

LOVE UNLOCKS the DOOR

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CHAPTER I

THE AFTERNOON CALL

IN one of the dull shabby thoroughfares which lie between Haymarket Station and the south side of Edinburgh there is a row of tall, well-built houses, once the residences of substantial citizens, but now divided

into flats, and let at a moderate rental.

Although undoubtedly fallen a little from its former estate, there still clings to Ardmillan Street that air of gentility so much sought after by that class whose means do not match their pride. In their eyes one of the chief recommendations of such a thoroughfare (of which there are many in Edinburgh) is the absence of shops. It is astonishing how the mere mention of a shop is sufficient to ban an otherwise desirable street in the estimation of some. The dulness of Ardmillan Street is irreproachable, but so favourite a place of abode does it seem to be that there is seldom an unoccupied house. It ascends in a gradual slope from the busy Haymarket corner, and is lost ultimately in the labyrinth of streets which lie thickly about Fountainbridge. From the windows of the top flats in the tenements an excellent view can be obtained of certain parts of the city, and on clear days the outline of the lion of Arthur's Seat can be discerned. But the view directly upon the street is depressing enough.

On a grey, rather damp November afternoon, a girl was sitting in the recess of one of the storm windows in the

roof of a house in Ardmillan Street; a table, on which stood a sewing machine, was before her. The room had the appearance of a workroom, though no business was supposed to be carried on in that street. The straitened means of the family to which the girl belonged, however, necessitated some effort, and they

were too proud to make it publicly.

Their aunt, who kept a baby-linen warehouse and fancy-work emporium in Hanover Street, gave her nieces a good deal of work, though she secretly despised them for what she termed "their silly pride". She was their mother's only sister, however, and though unmarried herself had in a manner mothered them since their mother's death. Their father was a teacher of mathematics in a boys' school, one of the old-fashioned private schools which latterly have fallen on evil days.

In fact, Morison did much hard work at a salary which a decent tradesman would have scorned. His only son was a teacher likewise, but, early sickened with the outlook, had emigrated to New Zealand. Only the father and two girls were left, and they lived in a house too highly rented for their means, and endured a great many sordid anxieties which were perfectly unnecessary, and might have been avoided, had they been content to live in a small house and dispense with that they called appearances.

Morison in his pride was aided and abetted by his elder daughter Jean, a tall, black-browed young woman, who kept her young sister in a wholesome state of subjection, in spite of the fact that Lily, being much more clever and artistic with her fingers, was the chief

wage-earner.

It was Lily who was bending over the work in the dull light of that November afternoon, and it was evident from her looks that she was in no happy frame of mind. Her face was pale, too pale for beauty, though her features were very good, and there was great sweetness of expression, also a kind of appealing child-like

prettiness which often struck casual observers, and made them feel interested in her for the moment.

She had a great quantity of very fair, soft hair, naturally curling about her brows, which with her soft appealing eyes of a deep blue colour made rather a striking picture. But it was a face that needed brightness, colour and life to bring out its full charm, and all these were certainly lacking at the moment.

Quite evidently she was not interested in her work. She threaded the machine needle, placed the long white seam ready for its operation, then throwing the window up as high as it would go, she leaned out over the roof as if desperate for a breath of fresh air. Her real object,

however, was to try and see the street below.

By craning her neck she could just catch a glimpse of a hundred yards of pavement at the far end, where it turned sharply into the wider thoroughfare of the Haymarket. To discern people was impossible, they looked like so many small, black, moving specks.

Disappointed, she closed the window, for the blacks from the chimneys were detrimental to her delicate work, which on no account must be washed before being offered for sale. Taking off her white apron, she threw it carelessly over the machine and the billows of soft

stuff lying about it, and ran downstairs.

The Morisons had two flats, if the attics could be considered as one. They were roomy places, but too near the roof to be comfortable quarters in an Edinburgh winter. By the payment of a small additional rent, Morison had secured the use of them so that the work might be kept up there, and he might not be reminded of its existence. He was abnormally sensitive regarding it, and the word work, applied to his daughters' occupation, was never mentioned in his presence.

The floor below consisted of a sitting-room, kitchen, and two small bedrooms. The sitting-room had two windows looking to the street, but had no advantage like the storm window, being set closely to the wall in

the old-fashioned way. Nothing could be seen from them but the corresponding strip of dull street below.

The fire had been made up by the careful Jean before she went out. She had lately taken an afternoon engagement to teach sewing in a girls' school out Dalry way. Thus it came to pass that between the hours of two and four Lily was alone in the house every day. She was supposed to have enough work in hand to keep her fully occupied during that time; the idea of mischief did not occur to Jean. She thought her sister a very idle, impracticable sort of person, but excused her on account of her youth and her pretty face. That she could be guilty of any folly was a thought she would have dismissed from her in angry disdain. Was she not a Morison, one of the Westerlea Morisons, though fallen on evil times?

This utter and unsuspecting confidence had perhaps helped to Lily's undoing. She was either expecting some one or watching on the vague chance that some one might come. She continued to sit at the window idly, with her chin in her hand, motionless, only when occasionally she would give a little start of recognition only to be followed by disappointment. As the clock struck three, however, there came a quick and somewhat peculiar ring at the door. She flew to open it, all her listlessness gone. A man stood on the door-mat in the dark passage—a tall young man, who, after being breathlessly assured that the coast was clear, stepped in and shut the door, and bending forward kissed the girl lightly on the forehead. But she clung to him almost sobbingly, as if her relief were too great for her words.

"I made sure you weren't coming to-day again, Gibbie, and see, it is three o'clock. Why didn't you get here sooner?"

"It's all very well, Lily," replied the man as he put off his coat and pulled his dark moustache. "You haven't the least idea of the difficulty it is for me to get off at this time. If you can't arrange so's we can meet

in the evenings, I fear it's all up."

"I've told you I can't get out at night, at least without telling a lot of lies, and this is the only time I can be sure of not being watched."

"And, supposing by any chance, your father or your sister should come back this afternoon," he said gloomily, as he closed the sitting-room door. "A nice mess it would be for us both."

"I shouldn't care," she said with a kind of quiet desperation. "I'm sick of all this, Gilbert. When is

it going to be over?"

He sat down on the edge of the table, still tugging at his moustache, and looking the reverse of happy. He was a young man of about four-and-twenty, good-looking, so far as features and figure go, and his clothes and air proclaimed him the gentleman, as understood by the society in which he moved. He was indeed exceedingly well dressed, with a somewhat foppish air. His ornaments, watchchain, studs and breastpin, were expensive, and he had a single stone diamond ring on his little finger, which gleamed and flashed as his hand moved to and fro on his face.

The girl stood by rather dejectedly, and at the moment she was less pretty and attractive than Gilbert

Horne had been accustomed to see her.

Further, she was not well dressed, her black skirt and somewhat faded blouse had too much the workroom air. Her delicate colour, once the tone of the peachbloom, had suffered some ravages, and had become that pasty, sickly white one is accustomed to see on the faces of working girls who seldom taste the fresh air. All these discouraging signs Gilbert Horne's eyes noted critically, because he was in a critical mood. The girl, to whom he represented destiny and hope, regarded him with a faintly imploring look which secretly irritated him. After all, their love-making had not been all on his side. Since the first day they had met by accident on Black-

ford Hill on a Sunday afternoon, she had been quite as eager as he, and, though for him the dream was over, she did not mean to let him go.

That is the trouble always—the one changes, the

other remains steadfast; then tragedy steps in.

"Beastly awkward it is for me to come out here in the afternoon," he repeated, thinking it policy to ignore her straight question. "If you'd only think a moment you'd see for yourself. Bonnygate is two miles from here, and I've got my work cut out there pretty stiffly for me. My father is a regular slave-driver, always at it himself, and determined every one else shall keep at it too. By a lucky chance he had something for me to do up in this direction, was out himself this afternoon at a Court meeting, or I'd have been dished."

"But I haven't seen you for three whole weeks, Gilbert," she said, in a low voice. "And I can't go on

like this."

"I don't like it either," he confessed, though in a lukewarm tone, which might mean anything. "I've told you it will be better later on. What's the use of meeting like this in a hole-and-corner way in terror, as we are this blessed minute, lest any of them come back. If you can't arrange better than that, Lily, we'll have to give up meeting at all."

"You couldn't come in the evening last twice I have written. And, though I waited at Blackford Hill last Wednesday night for two hours, you never came."

"But I explained," he said eagerly, "that I didn't get your note until the next day. I was out at Manderston at that dance I told you of, and we slept the night there. You should have remembered that it was the night of the dance, for I told you about it."

She was silent a moment, her eyes full of unspeakable thoughts. Her woman's intuition was quick and keen enough to discern that his brief passion was either dead or had suffered such abatement that parting no longer mattered to him. And he was still her all,

She put her hand up to the bosom of her dress, and drew from it a small scrap of newspaper. His eyes seemed to darken as he observed it. He knew too well what it contained. He stretched out his hand for it, but she drew back, shaking her head.

"No, I'll read it, Gilbert."

And she did in slow, measured tones.

"'We understand that a marriage has been arranged, and will shortly take place, between Mr. Gilbert Nicoll Horne, younger son of Mr. Gilbert Horne, J.P., of Bonnygate Works and Burton Lea, Cramond, and Mary Joliffe, only daughter of Lord Kilmartin and Mrs. Inglis, of 13 Moray Place.'"

"Is that true, Gilbert?" she asked in a hollow voice. "It was last Friday I saw it in the evening papers, two days after the Manderston ball, and I saw from the

papers that Miss Inglis was there."

"You seem to spend your chief time reading the newspapers, Lily. There's not a word of truth in it. They're anxious for it, and thought, I suppose, that this would force it on."

She shook her head, frankly disbelieving him, and

he saw it.

"I hoped there was a mistake, somewhere. Why does it read like that? Lord Kilmartin and Mrs. Inglis;

why not Lady Kilmartin?"

"Well, because he's only a law Lord, and a needy one at that; it's money they want, but I don't believe they think me good enough for her. I tell you, Lily, their

pride's awful."

"It's all over Edinburgh, this horrible pride," cried the girl passionately. "We suffer from it every day of our lives. We can be decently, honestly poor, but have to go on as if we had twice as big an income. Oh, I'm sure it is wrong. Well, I wanted you to come to-day to ask you about that paragraph. I thought it must be a mistake, but you ought to have contradicted it, Gilbert."

"What's the good? Besides, it pleases my governor and the rest of them for a bit until we've time to look round. He's got pride, too, I can tell you, and he thinks himself every bit as good as Lord Kilmartin. If it had been true, and things had come to be discussed between the respective fathers, my Lord would have discovered this. My governor won't stand patronising from law Lords or anybody else."

"He doesn't look as if he would." "Where have you seen him?"

"At that meeting about the Children's Hospital in the Music Hall last week. I saw he was to be the chairman, and I went to see him. I saw your sister there, too, sitting beside him on the platform in a red frock. Oh, she's lovely."

Horne looked still further annoyed.

"What good does it do, this sort of mean prying, Lily? Haven't I promised that you'll see them all some day?"

"It's a long time coming," said the girl with a sigh. Suddenly she flashed her big eyes on his face, and put

one straight question.

"When are you coming to speak to father?"

CHAPTER II

SUSPECTED

HORNE continued to tug at his moustache, at the same time regarding the girl from under his knit brows with a troubled air. He had never seen her in this mood before, and he hardly knew how to deal with it.

Of a passionate, masterful temper himself, he had hitherto been able to allay all her scruples, and persuade her to trust him implicitly.

"Some one's been talking to you, Lily; I believe

you've told, after all."

The girl shivered a little.

"No, I haven't, but there are times when I feel that

I must tell Auntie Bell."

"If you do, Lily, it'll be all up with us, I'm sure of it. If my father, for instance, or any of my people, had the slightest idea of it, I'd be turned out of the house."

"So should I," she muttered under her breath.

"If that's true, I don't see what's the good of waiting or expecting anything," she said aloud in a low, hopeless voice. "What's true now will be true next month or next year. Do you expect that they'll ever feel different about it?"

"I'll get round them by degrees," said Horne quietly. "You see, lately my father has been worried a lot. Business is not what it was, and I'm afraid that neither Walter nor I have come up to his expectation. I'm the lazy one, and Walter always seems to be the round

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peg in the square hole. Fact is, successful business men like my governor nearly always make mistakes about their sons, expect too much of them or something, I don't exactly know what, but there's always ructions."

Lily did not immediately reply. What he was saying did not interest her very much, her own affairs being

too important in her sight.

"Won't you sit down, dear? It's only a quarter past three; they can't be here for an hour yet. But when can we meet outside again? It really isn't safe to come here. I'm not coming back."

. He placed a chair for her, and taking her by the arm put her in it with some show of tenderness. To his dismay as she sat down she burst into tears. Now, Gilbert Horne hated the sight of a woman's tears, and at this particular moment they irritated him beyond all telling. But recognising the fact that he must keep his temper, he hid what he really felt.

"There, there, little girl! I know you hate all this

concealment. You can't hate it more than I do."

"If you don't let them know soon, Gilbert, I'll destroy myself," she said suddenly, drying her tears, and lifting her eyes full of a new resolution to his face.

"Why, what's the matter, Lily; you were quite

cheerful the last time we met?"

"Was I? I didn't feel cheerful. I am nearly certain Jean suspects something. She's been so snappy and horrid to me lately. I can't bear my life, this concealment is killing me. If only you'd let me tell Auntie Bell. You can't think how nice she is, and she'd keep our counsel, I'm sure, till the time when you give me leave to speak."

Horne shook his head emphatically.

"It's impossible, I tell you. At this particular moment if a hint of the affair came to my father's ears it would be all up with us for ever. Can't you put up with it for a few more months?"

"Impossible."

"Weeks then? I'm hoping next month to get a rise in my pay. Then we'll take a little house somewhere and live quietly till we can tell the whole truth."

"I want the house now, Gilbert, for I'm going to

leave here; I have quite made up my mind."

"I can't afford it at present. I've only a beggarly three pounds a week for my own pocket—a beastly shame. Yes, that's how the sons of rich men are treated, and everybody envying them. My father doesn't see that it's his treatment that paralyses us. We've no responsibility and precious little recognition of anything we do, so, of course, we do as little as we can."

"He didn't look that kind of man, and he made a beautiful speech. Auntie Bell was telling me how good he is to the Stockbridge poor, and how your sister sings

to the children at the mission every Monday."

"You're getting at it, bit by bit," he said with a hardly perceptible sneer. "I don't think your playing

the game fair, Lily, after all your promises."

"It's easy for you to speak. You should live here, then you'd know what I suffer," she said with a dull rebellious note in her voice. "I can't go on, I tell you;

something will need to be done."

Horne paused a moment, at his wits' end, yet shrewd enough to see that he must find some way of escape, for a time at least, until he could clear his feet. The sweetness of his passion for the girl who had staked her all on his promise had completely passed away; his fickle affections were already engaged elsewhere, and though the newspaper announcement was premature, it was in the main correct.

"You must give me till to-morrow," he said gloomily. "Can you meet me at the old place to-morrow evening

at half-past eight?"

"Yes, I must make an excuse. I'll finish up some work for my aunt, and go to her earlier in the evening, then I can go on to the toll."

"Very well. I'll go now, in case they come back. We've got ourselves into a frightful hole, Lily, and perhaps it was a mistake, though it was very sweet while it lasted."

She shook her head.

"I don't know; the price is big to pay. I sometimes wish I were dead."

Even his shallow heart was touched by these words, and a spectre of the old tenderness revived as he bent

over her to say "Good-bye".

She was changed from the bright, bonnie girl he had won a year ago, and he had tired. That was the beginning and the end. But he saw in her something new that day, a woman's resolve to have her rights, to be acknowledged before the world. And he wondered as he went down the dark staircase how in the world he was going to get out of the hole in which he had voluntarily placed himself. It was sufficient to torment him all the way home. Lily watched from the front window as he went down the street, and her face was a study in the emotions. She had loved, and did love him well, but she knew that so far as he was concerned it was over. But justice she must have and would have, the broken promise must be implemented; the vows he had sworn almost on his knees must be fulfilled. She was young and tender and yielding in disposition, but beneath there were many reserves of latent strength. And she had resolved that come what might, she would take her aunt into her confidence that very night.

She went quietly upstairs, finished the garment on which she was engaged, so that she might have the excuse to go across to her aunt's that evening, then she

went down again, and prepared the family tea.

She was setting out the cups, when she heard her sister's key in the door. Jean came right into the room,

and looked keenly at her sister.

"I met Jemima Bain just now, and she told me some one had been calling," she said with a brusqueness which indicated some inner uneasiness.

She was a tall, dark-skinned girl, with a certain style and handsomeness about her, a great contrast to her sister, yet striking enough in her way. But her proud. independent spirit, and her sharp tongue did not commend her as a friend. An excellent woman Jean Morison, with a very high ideal of duty, which she kept persistently before herself, and still more persistently before other people, but an uncomfortable person to live with in the house. Conscious of power to shine in a higher sphere, and constantly discontented with her meagre lot, Jean Morison was undoubtedly embittered. You could see it in her face. Of late, as Lily had said, she had developed a suspicion of her sister, and felt that she was keeping something from her. Hence the extreme suggestiveness of her remark about the caller of the afternoon.

"Jemima Bain had better be minding her own business," replied Lily with a most unusual snap in her voice. "The gasman called to test the meter, and

leave his card; there it is."

She pointed to the mantelpiece where the card stood, and Jean was obliged to drop the matter. She pulled off her gloves, and went forward to give the fire a careful poke. At the same moment she descried on her father's easy chair a pair of gloves, men's gloves, of a colour and make unknown in their house. She held them up, and her face set in a hard line.

"Did the gasman leave these?" she asked cruelly. Lily gave a start, and the colour flamed in her cheek. But she recovered herself immediately, and turned to

her sister a perfectly impassive face.

"No, they were left by a friend of mine, who came after the gasman. I wonder which of the gentlemen Jemima Bain's prying eyes saw going down the stair?"

Jean's face flushed, and at the sight of it Lily's anger

seemed to burn more fiercely.

"If you've trysted Jemima Bain to watch me when

you're out, Jean, you and she can save yourselves the trouble, for I'll see who I like, and live my own life in spite of you."

Jean never spoke a word. She was a hard woman, but she loved her sister truly, and the words terrified

her.

"I never set Jemima to watch you, Lily, and fine you know it, but there's something going on that shouldn't be, and I mean to be at the bottom of it. There's something wrong with you, Lily, and has been

for a year or more.'

Lily never spoke, but walked calmly across the passage to the little kitchen, and set the kettle down on the fire. Then she clattered among the plates on the tray, taking a lot of unnecessary time over them, and hoping her father would come in before Jean could speak again. She was not afraid of her saying anything to him. They were both too much afraid of him: a self-contained, austere man, soured by disappointment and baulked ambition, and warped by the pride which would not permit him to make the best even of such things as he had. They might have been a happy little household enough. There were many, even in proud Edinburgh, that could be happy, and were happy, with less. But the Morisons did not belong to that fortunate band.

Jean stood by the table with her hand to her heart, and was so standing when Lily returned with the tray, and proceeded to set the plates round the table.

"So you won't tell me who was here?"
"No," replied Lily quietly. "I will not."

"It is not safe, Lily," she cried shrilly. "If father were to find out that you were having visits from any man here he'd turn you out of the house. For it can't be as it should be, or he wouldn't choose a time when you are alone; he'd come when father was at home, as any decent man who means right by a girl would."

"Maybe," replied Lily tranquilly."

"Lily, if you don't tell me, I'll have to speak to father."

"You can if you like," replied Lily. "I'm not caring. What good would it do? He may turn me out—I have no doubt he would; but neither you nor he would be

any the wiser or the better for that."

Jean surveyed her sister almost desperately. Not only was she anxious, but she was filled with an insatiable curiosity. Their lives were so grey and empty, this sudden revealing of a romance in the background filled the horizon with all sorts of possibilities.

"Either you are ashamed of him or he is ashamed of you," she said hardly. "There is only the two ways of it."

"Have it as you like," replied Lily.

She finished the laying of the table, and then quite suddenly she stopped opposite her sister, and looked at

her with great calmness.

"Listen, Jean, there is something, and has been for a while, but I'm not going to tell you yet. I can't. I've given my promise. But it's going to be all right, I know that much. You can please yourself about telling father. You can imagine whether it'll make any of us happier."

"But I could keep counsel, Lily," said the elder sister with the first note of pleading in her voice. "And

you're so young, bairn, I'm afraid.'

Lily turned her head away.

"I can't tell you, Jean, and I won't, so don't say any more. But I think this, if you like, that God doesn't take sufficient thought of what it means to lassies like us to have their mother taken away when they are little. That's been at the bottom of the misery all along."

CHAPTER III

THE TOUCH OF SYMPATHY

THERE was very little said at tea time, but that was not unusual enough to cause any remark. Morison, a large, loose, spare man, with strong features and a short straggling grey beard and side whiskers, sat with a book propped up against the loaf, and read con-

tinuously through the meal.

It was not that he despised his daughters, or intended any rudeness; he had simply nothing to say to them, and it was his habit to waste nothing, not even time. Jean had often resented the dull, grim, unsociable meals; to-day she was thankful for it. It gave her time to ponder on what she felt was an earthquake in their

monotonous existence.

Lily, if silent, did not seem concerned. She ate nothing, but drank feverishly two cups of tea, then rose and left the table, saying she had some work to take home to her aunt. The duties of the house, such as they were, had naturally divided themselves into a certain routine. Lily prepared the tea, Jean cleared it away. So there was no confusion. The long evenings were generally spent by Morison over his books, mathematical study chiefly, solaced by an occasional pipe. He was never dull; desires for the brighter side of life, so long repressed, had ceased to be insistent. Morison at least was comparatively at peace, and now looked forward to another world where he sometimes grimly prophesied that things would be evened up.

His daughters sewed quietly, either at the table or upstairs, when the click of the sewing machine made a monotonous accompaniment to grey thoughts. It was no life for two young girls, and had Edward Morison been less self-centred he would have felt no small

anxiety concerning his daughters.

But they did not trouble him; he had a poor opinion of women in the mass, relegating them in the category of his mind to their proper sphere in the domestic atmosphere. The boy, finding his environment intolerable, had broken away, and though the blow had been bitter at the time, there was peace now. But Edward Morison had yet to learn that peace can sometimes be purchased too dear.

Jean, pursued by a nameless dread, followed Lily upstairs, instead of proceeding as usual to clear away. Lily turned to her sharply from the little table where

her work lay.

"I am going to my aunt's; you can come if you think

I'm telling a lie," she said, dispassionately.

"I don't think that; what I do think is that you are not fit to go out by yourself. You look ill, Lily. If

father doesn't mind I'll walk over with you."

"I'd rather go by myself, Jean, thank you," Lily replied, though in a softer voice. They had never quarrelled, and if she had not been so distraught concerning other matters, she would have felt even this

slight difference with her sister most acutely.

"I won't be long, unless auntie wants me particularly to stop. Sometimes she does it if she has a slack night. And you can keep your mind easy, Jean; I'm not going out to meet the man that left the gloves. There they are." She pointed to them on the mantelpiece, where she had laid them when she came upstairs. Jean could have smiled if she had not felt so desperate.

Lily had broken clean away, in a far more complete sense than even Ted had done; she had shut the door of her inner self, whereas Ted had been loud enough in

his explanation of his revolt.

Jean Morison was a clever woman, who had inherited a good deal of her father's quiet strength of will and reserve, but she did not understand the life of the heart. She had her own moments of personal depression, when she had felt the dull routine of a grey existence powerless to satisfy, but she had never voiced her discontent, but had crushed it down as wicked and unwomanly. Morison at least had set before his children a high ideal of duty as he understood it, which was to set your teeth and endure.

It was a creed, however, insufficient for the young life that had withered in its bloom under his roof.

Lily made a neat bundle of the garments she had finished, and there was a curious expression on her face as her fingers touched the dainty things. When it had been neatly tied up, she took her hat and jacket from the peg behind the door, the ordinary everyday things, which reassured Jean, for if she had been going to meet a lover she would certainly have adorned herself. Then she nodded to her sister and went downstairs. moment later the door shut with a quick bang, and there was nothing for Jean but to go about her evening

As she re-entered the sitting-room with her empty tray, her father looked round.

"Has Lily gone out?" he asked, carelessly.

"Yes; only to Auntie Bell's."

"When will she be back? It's a pity. There is a lecture at the Philosophical this evening we might have gone to; Smeaton gave me the tickets. He had them from the man who is to lecture, Dr. Grimshaw. Smeaton met him in Switzerland last summer, and they got to know one another very well. He's actually stopping at Smeaton's to-night."

Smeaton was the headmaster of the school where her

father taught.

"It's a pity you didn't speak of it sooner. Lily may not be back in time. You know aunt often keeps her quite late, and this is the day the shop is shut for the half-holiday."

Morison winced, as he invariably did at the word shop, and Jean remembered that she ought not to have

used it.

"It doesn't matter," he said curtly. "It doesn't go in till eight; if she's not back I can go myself."

"But there would be time for me to go over to

auntie's and tell her."

"No, no; never mind. Let her take her chance."

Meanwhile Lily, somewhat comforted by the freshness of the air and the cheerful brightness of the lighted streets, was pursuing her way across to George Street. The little shop kept by her aunt was at a corner, and was really a basement shop, though very snug, and well known to Edinburgh ladies, who were very faithful to Miss Oliphant. She was a character in herself, they often said, and were fond of bringing friends and visitors to see her, as well as her wares, which were certainly very tempting.

When Lily saw the closed shutters and doors, she felt momentarily dismayed, remembering that it was the half-holiday, and that perhaps her aunt might be out. For she was one of those cheery personalities who made friends everywhere, and she was very fond of

going out to tea.

She ran down the steps and tapped lightly at the side door. Great was her relief when her aunt immediately opened it herself. She had her hat on, however, a curious, mushroom-looking thing with black ribbon strings tied in an immense bow under her chin. It was not a common hat, and gave a touch of individuality to an interesting personality.

It also made a most becoming frame to a face of great sweetness and winsomeness, albeit it had the lines of

fifty years upon it.

Miss Oliphant was of ample proportions, but her buxsomeness suited her; she was a comfortable person, who looked out upon life with cheerful and philosophic eyes. She smiled pleasantly at sight of her niece, of whom she was very fond. She liked them both, and nothing would have pleased her better than to have had one of them perpetually with her; but her brotherin-law Morison she could not stand, and never met him unless it could not be avoided. What he called dignity she called fushionless pride, for Isabel Oliphant was Scotch of the Scotch, proud of her native tongue, and constantly deploring its disuse. In fact, she represented old Edinburgh, and was one of its most charming products. The ladies who visited her loved her for her quaint sayings and her strong racial characteristics, while not a few Americans had found her out in the tourist season, and sent troops of their friends to make her acquaintance.

"Come in, lassie. I was wondering about ye," she said, cordially. "Ye hinna been lang wi' the wark; there was nae hurry; but I've something bonnie for ye this time," she said, as she held open the door for her to go in. "D'ye mind that sofa blanket, wi' the thistles

on it, that went to Boston last year?"

Lilv nodded.

"Well, I've an order for ither twa, to be ready for Christmas. Did ye ever hear the like? Can ye do it, d'ye think? They'll pay ony mortal thing to get them in time."

"I'll see. If Jean'll help, we might manage them. She's good at crewels," replied Lily, as she stepped

within. "Were you going out, auntie?"

"Jist doon tae the mission. They're giein' the bairns a tea there the nicht, at least Miss Horne is. She hasna been lang wi' us, but she's workin' grand, an' she has plenty o' money, which is what we need when we're workin' among puir folk. No' that I haud wi' makin' paupers o' them, but there's whiles when a

judeecious bawbee mak's a' the difference between happiness and misery."

Lily looked disappointed, which her aunt noted at

once

"If you're in no hurry come doon wi' me. Ye wad like to see it."

"Could I come?" asked Lily, with an almost painful eagerness. She felt no special interest in the work of the mission, but the name of Horne acted like a magnet. She would have an opportunity of being near some of her lover's folk, and all sorts of thoughts were in Lily's mind. She was developing on lines which surprised herself, and which would have made Gilbert Horne even more uncomfortable than he was.

"Had your tea? You look but jimpy, lass. You sit in the hoose too much. Hoo's Jean, an' the auld man?"

Miss Oliphant was never respectful to Morison; indeed, she did not even in her mind do him justice. She was very proud of the business she had made, and had never forgiven the slights he had put upon it. He had never crossed the threshold of the shop in his life, and only permitted his daughters to come because it was expedient. Miss Oliphant had once told him with great frankness what she thought about him and his treatment of his family. There were good qualities in both, but each seemed to bring out the worst in the other, and it was the best policy to keep apart.

"They're well enough, and there was a letter from Ted this morning, auntie. He's got a place up country from Dunedin somewhere. Not much money, but he'll

get the outdoor life he has always wanted."

"That'll be guid for him; he had nae life in Ardmillan Street," replied Miss Oliphant soberly. "Sit ye doon a meenit. We'll dae yet. Will ye come, think ye?"

"Would it be late?"

"No, it's only six o'clock now; the tea's at half-past, an' ye needna stop lang. It's their Christmas, you

see, an' Miss Horne wanted it early in the month for

fear she micht be awa' at Christmas hersel'."

Lily did not sit down, but stood by the table in the bright little sitting-room, and began to undo the parcel she had brought.

Miss Oliphant watched her silently a moment, struck somewhat painfully by the girl's fragile look. Also she observed that her fingers, as she untied the string,

seemed to tremble.

"Lassie, ye are nae weel," she said kindly. "Sit doon, and I'll get ye something. It's a doctor you are needin'; you'll no gang hame the nicht. I'll send a message to your faither that I'm keepin' ye."

"No, auntie; I'm all right really. Don't trouble about me. I've got something on my mind; that's all."

"Something you want to tell me, maybe?" said the elder woman anxiously.

"I'm not sure. Let's go down to the mission, and

I'll see after we come back."

Miss Oliphant put no further questions, but one thing she was determined on—that she would go over and see Morison, perhaps that night, if they were not kept too late at the mission.

Apparently the time had come for some further plain

speech to him concerning his daughters.

"Jist as ye like, my dear. I'm your Auntie Bell, ye ken, an' ye have nae mither. Hoots, lass, dinna greet. Drink that, see, and we'll gang. You'll see something doon by, maybe, that'll mak' your ain sma' troubles seem like naething."

CHAPTER IV

THE MISSION TREAT

THEY took a car outside the shop door, and were quickly conveyed to within a few minutes' walk of their destination, which was Sinclair Street, Stockbridge. There in one of the old Free Church schools, which Gilbert Horne, of the Bonnygate Works, had bought and presented to the mission, they came upon a

very animated scene.

Lily, who had never seen anything like it before, stood still in wonderment just inside the door, while her aunt, well known there, and always welcome, pushed her way forward to the platform, where stood an immense Christmas tree laden with good things. The hall was full of children in their best suits, in white frocks and fine pinafores, drinking tea out of tin mugs. and with big bags of buns on the desks in front of them. A goodly sprinkling of young ladies were flitting about with bright tin kettles in their hands, replenishing the cups, and keeping the children in order. But they were a very noisy as well as a happy crew. Lily Morison's eyes wandered quickly across the throng, missing the face she had come to see, but presently she saw her aunt talking to Miss Horne, up close to the Christmas tree, for which Miss Oliphant had brought sundry articles carefully wrapped in brown paper. Nobody paid any attention to Lily, who stood, rather disconsolately, by the door, until some one touched her arm. She gave

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a start, and immediately saw by her side a girl about her own age, dressed in black with a little toque of white fur perched back among her curly brown hair, and a very sweet face, somewhat flushed with the exertions of the evening, beamed upon her.

"Won't you sit down or come and help?" she said quickly. "I must shut the door, I'm afraid, because we

can't take any more in from outside."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't notice I had left the door

open."

"It doesn't matter at all for a few moments; I daresay the rush of cold air is what we need. You came

with Miss Oliphant, didn't you?"

"Yes, she's my aunt," replied Lily with a pardonable pride, for quite evidently Auntie Bell was at home there, and greatly beloved. Miss Horne had her hand through her arm, and was talking rapidly, her beautiful face eager and animated as if it were something of great importance.

"Who is that talking to my aunt?" she asked, though

she knew quite well.

"That's Miss Biddy Horne. She has just lately come to the mission, and it's been a different place since. She's so good and delightful, you can't think."

"She looks it. I really think she is the loveliest

woman I have ever seen," said Lily involuntarily.

Her companion smiled, well pleased.

"We all think that, and she is as good and dear as she is lovely. Come up, and I'll introduce you. But I must introduce myself first. My name's Elsie Gerard."

"Oh, thank you," said Lily a trifle confused, yet determined not to lose the chance. "Mine is Morison, Lily Morison; my mother was Miss Oliphant's sister."

"I see. Well, let's go up. Perhaps you'll come to the mission too. We never have enough of helpers for the ordinary week-day work. I have a good deal to do at home myself, but I come as often as I can. I love it so. There's Miss Horne coming this way. Biddy, come here a moment."

Arrested by the clear call from the passage, Biddy Horne stopped in her work of filling an empty bag with more buns and came down to them.

"This is Miss Oliphant's niece, Miss Morison. She came with her. I've just been telling her how we need new helpers. I'll leave you to tell her how splendid

Miss Oliphant is."

Biddy frankly held out her hand, but Lily Morison did not deeply interest her. She had the languid, insipid look of the indifferent looker-on, but her face had something pathetic about it which somehow touched her warm heart.

Biddy herself was the picture, nay, the embodiment, of life, and health, and energy. Her rich colouring, a little accentuated by the warm atmosphere of the room, had never seemed more brilliant, while her big beautiful Irish eves seemed able to read the very soul.

"I should just think Miss Oliphant is splendid; in fact, she's the heart and soul of this mission, and keeps us all right. Do you live in Edinburgh? How is it you

have never come to us before?"

There was a slight imperiousness in her voice which reminded Lily, afar off, of the masterful voice she had heard that afternoon.

"Aunt has often asked me. I don't know why I

didn't before. I didn't think I'd like it."

"We don't like it at first," replied Miss Horne confidentially. "But it grows on one. I think it's the most splendid work in the world brightening up the children's lives a bit, and helping the mothers as we go along. But without Miss Oliphant we should make all sorts of mistakes. She's the pilot, the captain, the final court of appeal-why, everything, and we all adore her. Won't you take off your jacket, and help pour out the tea? Some of us have been at it getting ready the best part of the day, and of course we're a tiny bit tired now. There, take my kettle and I'll get another one."

And before she knew where she was, Lily found herself going up one form and down another filling up the teacups, and subject to all sorts of remarks from the children, who were always critical of newcomers. It was the ambition of every child present to be served either by Miss Horne or Miss Gerard, who shared the honours almost equally.

"Who's that lighting the candles on the tree?" Lily asked when her first friend came round to her after a time. Elsie turned her head in the direction of the platform, where a tall and very aristocratic-looking young lady, with a somewhat grave proud face, was

putting the finishing touches to the tree.

"That's another of our workers—Miss Inglis from Moray Place—but she doesn't come very often. This is a special occasion."

Lily Morison turned as pale as death.
"Is she the daughter of Lord Kilmartin?"

"Yes," answered Elsie, all unconscious of the tragedy she was helping to advance. "Now, we're all ready, only waiting for Mr. Horne; he's to give the prizes, and say a few words to the children, I believe. There he is. I've never met him myself yet, though he gave this school to the mission. You see, I haven't been coming

here long."

Lily Morison put her hand to her heart, and turned her face with a strange expectancy to the door. A grey-haired, fine-looking man entered first, followed by a younger one, Gilbert Horne, attracted to a place, in which he could not naturally have the smallest interest, by the fact that the woman he loved was taking part. Not Lily Morison; oh, no, she was the last woman he expected or desired to meet in such circumstances.

It was a few moments before he did see her, and then she had recovered her composure. She sat down quietly at the end of a seat by the side of a little boy in a red comforter, to whom she even bent to speak a few smiling words. It was a strange, even a ghastly situation, and she marvelled at her own calmness; nay, after a fashion she enjoyed it, and determined to see it out. The dull resentment which had followed upon the disappointment of the afternoon would have a little revenge; if there was any truth in the newspaper paragraph, then the moment when Gilbert Horne should see her, Lily Morison, under the same roof with the girl he was reported to be going to marry, would be a terrible one for him.

It was a little time before he saw her, partly because she was sitting rather far back, and the children would insist on standing up to view the platform better. They were still very noisy, but Miss Oliphant with a comprehensive wave of her arm and a commanding shout got

their attention, and quieted them for a moment.

"Now, bairns, be quiet if ye can, an' if ye canna, you'll pretty quick find yoursel's ootside the door. Ye'll no' like that, for the tree will be left inside, mind that. Weel, I'm no gaun to speechify ye, I only want ye to gie three roosin' cheers for your very best friend in the worl', Mr. Horne, an' syne for ye to sit as quate as mice till he gies ye a word. Efter that if ye behave yoursel's maybe you'll get something aff the tree."

She stepped back amid deafening applause, and Mr. Horne, smiling as if he thoroughly enjoyed the affair, stepped forward. The cheering immediately became still more deafening, and it was some minutes before it was stilled sufficiently for him to speak. He was a tall, fine-looking man, remarkably youthful for his years, with a pleasant, even a handsome face, and a suggestion of power which surprised none who knew what Gilbert Horne's life and work in the city of Edinburgh had been. He was the very best type any city can produce, a self-made man, whose mind and heart had expanded with his success, and with all his ability, which had placed him in the very front rank alike of commercial and civic life, he had never felt more thoroughly at home than at the present moment. He loved children,

and could always find the fitting word to arrest their

Lily glanced from him across the hall where Gilbert, his son, had taken his seat, as if by right, by the side of

Miss Inglis.

A curious fire burned in her eyes, and her colour had heightened until she looked marvellously beautiful. Her aunt watching from the platform noticed the metamorphosis, and decided that it was outside interest of a sympathetic kind that the girl wanted to rouse her. And she determined more than ever to have it out with Morison without delay.

It was a very auspicious occasion, one calling forth all the best impulses of human nature and life. Yet how little dreamed those who surveyed the scene with such satisfaction what elements of tragedy were present under that roof, apparently consecrated for the time being entirely to the cause of charity and loving-kind-

ness.

Despite their natural impatience to get the good things down from the tree, the children listened with breathless attention to the speech of Mr. Horne, whom they worshipped as the kind gentleman who had given them the mission hall, and who was further to present them all with a new threepenny bit at Christmas time. The thought of past favours, no less than anticipation of those to come, kept them respectfully quiet while he spoke. He was in the middle of a story, and the silence was very profound, when the eyes of Gilbert Horne, roving round the hall, suddenly fell on the face of Lily Morison.

She was looking at him quite straight, with a curious

half-mocking smile on her lips.

She saw the start he gave, the sudden blanching of his face, and enjoyed her moment of power. But it was briefly lived, for the strain was too much for her already overcharged heart.

Certain that if she remained a moment longer she



She paused in a doorway, and immediately was face to face with Gilbert Horne.



must faint away she seized the moment when the close of the story was vociferously cheered to steal out of the hall. She carried her jacket over her arm, and at the door she spoke a word to Elsie.

"It's rather hot. Please, tell my aunt I couldn't stop, that I had to get home. I was afraid I might

faint, but I'm all right now."

Elsie spoke a word of sympathy, and saw her to the door.

She turned away from it, and leaning a moment against the railings which protected the windows gave

way to a hysterical burst of laughter.

Her limbs were shaking, and though the cold air revived her she felt that she must rest just a moment. When she did turn away at last, she did not notice that the hall door had opened again. But as she crossed the road preparatory to getting the car at the corner, she was conscious that some one had followed her. She paused in a doorway, and immediately was face to face with Gilbert Horne.

CHAPTER V

REASSURED

CILBERT HORNE, pursued and tormented by his own conscience, knowing he had lied to Lily Morison in the afternoon, imagined in her face when his eyes suddenly fell upon it in the mission hall, a desperate resolve.

He never for a moment attributed her presence there to the mere accident it actually was. Nay, he beheld in it part of a deeply-laid and concerted plan to bring him to confusion and disaster before his own people and the

woman whom it was his ambition to marry.

His rage was only equalled by his dismay, but realising that for the time being Lily had completely the whip hand, he approached her, keeping a curb upon himself. She smiled a little as the light fell athwart them, where they stood, that curious little smile that had neither mirth nor sweetness in it, but was merely a passing tremor of the face. She expected a torrent of angry words, but none came. Instead, he bent his head quite humbly before her, and spoke with a studied quietness like a man who anticipated the worst.

"So you're determined, Lily, that it'll be all up with me, so we'd better face our immediate prospects, which represent a two-roomed flat somewhere in the slums,

and sordid poverty for the rest of our days."

She did not immediately answer; when she did she made no comment on his words.

"I am going home," she said quietly, "in the car, I

thought; but I can walk if you like, if you want to come."

He breathed a quick relief, for her tone was quite gentle, her manner subdued. He ventured to take her

by the arm.

"Of course, I'll walk with you, only jolly glad to get the chance, and I want to hear your reasons for playing such a ghastly trick on me to-night. It was not very kind, was it, Lily? After all, I haven't been so very bad to you that you should want to heap disaster of the worst kind on my head."

"Oh, no," she said evenly. "Not bad at all. I

never said you had been, did I?"

"You implied it this afternoon, and when I saw you sitting there to-night I thought you had come to clinch the business, to make a public statement. I felt pretty ghastly for a moment or two. I believe they noticed it."

"How did you excuse yourself leaving the meeting?"

"I said I felt bowled over with the close atmosphere, and that I'd be back in a moment. Nobody noticed it

particularly or cared."

"Except Miss Inglis," she said suggestively, and he bit his lip. It had been his rising hope that perhaps the matter might be simply explained after all, and that she

would not know who sat by his side.

"Aren't you going to tell me how you knew I was to be there to-night?" he asked eagerly. "It's queer, for I didn't know myself till I got back to the works, then the governor was going, driving straight up, so I came with him. There was no arrangement about it, Lily, and it was the merest accident that I happened to be sitting beside Miss Inglis."

"Was it?" she asked with the listless manner of one who did not greatly care about the motive, for whom

the fact had been enough.

"Now I've owned up, won't you tell me how you happened to be there? I can't for the life of me under-

stand it. I didn't know you were aware of the existence of what they call the Sinclair Mission, about which all the girls seem to have gone mad this winter. Can't for the life of me see what they get out of it."

Had she been a vindictive woman she could easily have tormented him further, but she still cared enough for him to be happy in his presence, and his pleading,

miserable air melted all her resentment.

"It was accident, too, my going there to-night," she assured him. "I happened to get over to my aunt's, Miss Oliphant's, just as she was leaving for the mission, and she asked me to go."

"Is she mixed up in it too? Was she there to-

night?"

"Yes, that elderly woman in the big hat."

"Oh, that's your aunt. She's a great pal of all the girls there. You haven't told her anything, have you, Lil?"

"Oh, no, but I may. I'm not sure."
"Don't," he said coaxingly. "If only you don't give the show away for a little longer everything will come right."

"How long?" she asked jealously. "Everything de-

pends on how long."

"Well, a month or two at the most."

She shook her head.

"I can't wait as long as that. It's impossible. They're beginning to suspect something at home, at least my sister is. This afternoon she found the gloves you left; besides somebody told her you had called."

"Oh!" said Horne with a whistle of dismay. "Did

they know me?"

"Oh, no, but she knows there's something going on. You've never seen Jean? She'll never rest now till she

ferrets everything out."

Horne tugged at his moustache, and they ascended the steep hill on the dark side of the road in silence. She leaned somewhat heavily on his arm, and his support was tender enough. Relieved from the horror of the last half-hour, he was disposed to be very kind to her for the rest of the evening. For she had had him in her power, and had not used it. Though not a particularly generous man himself, her forbearance touched him.

"I'm willing to wait two months more," she said presently in the manner of one who had weighed up everything and come to a conclusion, "if you do two things."

"What are they?" he asked almost breathlessly. "You know I'd do anything to get this horrible tangle

straightened out. What fools we've been!"

"I have been anyhow. Well, I want you to get me a house somewhere—a little house out in the country, I don't care how small it is, and let me go there. The other is to tell my Auntie Bell that I'm your wife."

"The first will be easy enough, but why the second? She'd never hold her tongue, and, you see, as matters are at home now, the governor would never forgive me. I'm in his black books. I'm trying to work myself back into his good graces, and he's improving. If I were to let out on him now what has happened, he'd simply kick me out of the house; then where would we be? What am I fit for? I haven't been brought up to anything, worse luck, and it's the governor's fault entirely, though he doesn't see it. It's a splendid idea that of the little house. We'll take a run out Dalkeith or Portobello way on Saturday afternoon, and see what we can find. I wish I'd thought of that before, then I'll be able to come and see you comfortably; but don't tell your aunt. I don't see what you want to tell her for. She's an old maid anyhow; she'd never understand or forgive you. She'd set everybody by the ears."

"You don't know her. She's the only one I care about," said Lily with a different note in her voice. "She's a splendid woman, and she's been as good as ten mothers to us. She doesn't get on with father, or

we should see more of her; but I'm sure if it hadn't

been for Auntie Bell I'd have run away long ago."

"Just wait two months," he pleaded, "and let us keep the thing to ourselves. In a month or so I'm going to have a straight talk with the governor, and ask him to give me a better position at the works, and a rise of salary. There's a little bit of money coming to me from my mother when I'm twenty-five; that'll

be in June. Then we'd be all right."

"You're always saying you're miserable at Bonnygate, and that there's no prospect. Couldn't you get enough money from your father to take us abroad? Ted says New Zealand is a splendid country, any amount of scope. I'd—I'd give anything to get out of Edinburgh. I hate it more than I can say. It's so deadly dull, so stuck up, a wretched hole for anybody to live in but those who are at the top of the tree and think them-

selves somebody."

"I quite agree with you, but it would be burning my boat to clear out, Lily, and leave Walter to haul in all the shekels. Not that he cares particularly for them. He's a good old sort, Walter, though as slow as they make 'em. But none of us comes up, unfortunately, to the governor's high mark. That's the worst of men like him, who have a genius for business. They've no quarter for other people who can't come up to them. Is it our fault if we are born without that particular kind of brains?"

"Two months," she repeated. "Well, I'll wait two months if nothing happens, but after that you must tell

them we are married, Gilbert, or I will."

He winced under the brim of his hat, for her tone though quiet was determined. It was his nature to plot and temporise, however, and he did not suffer his real dismay to be disclosed.

"All right, little woman, keep your spirits up, and meet me at the old place on Saturday afternoon at three, then we'll go house-hunting. I'm on the square, Lil, if only you'd trust me a little further. Now I'm going to put you on this car, for you are tired out, and I must be getting back."

"And you're sure it isn't true, about Miss Inglis, I mean? If I thought that, Gilbert, I'd go right back

now, and tell them all."

"It's all bunkum. How could there be any truth in it when I have you? They'd like it right enough. It's the governor's money they're after, being as poor as mice themselves, though stuck-up to the last degree." Then a happy thought struck him, and he uttered it lightly. "It's a mistake in the name they made, and it's being corrected. Of course it's Walter they want for her—no second sons for my Lord Kilmartin. He had too keen an eye for the main chance."

This explanation, at once so plausible and so simple, cleared the last doubt from the girl's trusting mind, and she smiled upon him happily with all the enchanting

sweetness which had first won his heart.

Also the prospect of escape from the bondage of her own home was so alluring that she felt almost light of heart. The readiness with which he had agreed to her half-timidly advanced suggestion reassured her regarding his good faith. She even inwardly reproached herself for doubting him.

"I didn't mean to worry you, Gilbert, and I do trust you," she murmured just as the great glaring eyes of the car came rolling towards them. "It's because I'm so miserable at home. I really can't stand it any longer."

"You shan't, darling," he said warmly. "Good night, and take care of yourself till Saturday afternoon

at three."

He helped her in, raised his hat, and walked away. When the car rolled away in the opposite direction

When the car rolled away in the opposite direction he drew a sharp breath of relief, and took out his cigar

"It was a narrow squeak; a little house—by Jove, a pretty large order; but something will have to be

done, I see. Well, I'll try and get her to go as far as possible, but I don't exactly see what is to be the end. I must think it out. No; there must be no house. She must stop where she is—it's the only way—but it'll take a lot of manœuvring. Gad, what a fool I've been."

Another car came down, he jumped on it, and was carried swiftly down to the corner of Sinclair Street, having been absent from the Mission Hall exactly

fifteen minutes.

Lily got out when the car stopped at Princes Street, and took another to the Haymarket, whence she walked

up to her own home.

As she rang the street door bell the chimes of St. George's rang eight. Jean was on the landing hanging anxiously over the balustrade to watch for her, and

relief sprang into her eyes when she saw her.

"You've been a long time," she said with that curt, ungracious manner characteristic of her. It meant nothing—it was only her way—but a thousand times it jarred on her sister's sensitive temperament, and was one of the reasons why she had found Horne's flattering speech so alluring.

There was certainly very little of the grace of life in that Ardmillan Street flat, and the days passed in a grey

succession, monotonously alike.

"Auntie Bell was going out," answered Lily quietly; "and I went with her to a mission treat on the north

side. I left her there."

"Father's gone to a lecture at the Philosophical," said Jean, still further relieved, as she led the way into the house. She had suffered no small torture in the last hour, fearful lest something would happen to her sister. To see her return so naturally and apparently brighter than when she went away undoubtedly relieved the tension.

"What a queer thing," said Lily, as she entered the sitting-room. "I never knew him do that before.

What's on?"

"Smeaton gave him tickets, and we might all have gone if you had been in," said Jean severely, indicating that she had been deprived of a rare treat.

"I shouldn't. But why didn't you go yourself?"

"Because I saw you hadn't taken a key."

"But I could have gone to sit with the sweet Miss Bain," said Lily with a slightly curling lip. Somehow Jean rubbed her the wrong way.

"You've got your knife into Jemima, but she isn't a

bad sort," standing up for her only friend.

"I didn't say she was. I can't stand her; that's all. Look here, Jean, we've got to get two sofa blankets made for auntie in a fortnight—the thistle pattern. They're to go to America for Christmas, so we'll need to buckle to. She's to send the wools and things to-morrow."

Jean made no reply. She perceived that the closed door still stood between her sister and herself, and the apprehension of impending trouble began once more to loom largely before her.

There was no hope of any confidence being estab-

lished between them.

She retired somewhat sullenly to the work she had been busy on at the table, and Lily went slowly to her own room.

CHAPTER VI

FOREBODINGS

I THINK I'll go over to Auntie Bell's when I come out of school this afternoon, as father is not coming home till seven," said Jean Morison to her sister one day as she prepared to go out to her daily occupation. A week had passed since the occurrence which had so upset her, and no further conversation had passed between them regarding it.

The tell-tale gloves still lay quite openly on the mantelpiece of the workroom, which satisfied Jean that there had been no second meeting. Lily, she fancied, looked brighter, and her fears began to be a little

allayed.

"There's the sofa blanket. Could you take it?" asked Lily eagerly. "Mine's finished. I put the last stitches in while I was watching the dinner this morning. How far on are you?"

"Only about half. Yes, I'll take it, if you like to roll

it up."

Lily nodded and ran up the stairs. After half a moment Jean followed her with a piece of brown paper and a string. She laid it on the table, and watched Lily while she folded it into a neat, square parcel.

"You've never sent back the gloves to your friend," she said suddenly, making one of those remarks which are far from intentional, but which sometimes hit the

mark.

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"No," replied Lily with apparent serenity. "I'm

not going to bother about them.'

"They're worth ten shillings; they're real reindeer. I've seen them in the Copenhagen shop," said Jean, who was of a thrifty mind.

"Are they? Tell auntie it's much better than the last one, for the shades are much prettier. I hope

she'll like it."

"I doubt you'll have to finish the other one too," said Jean as she took the parcel in her hand. "What are you going to do this afternoon?" she added, glancing round the room, which wore an air of extreme and unusual tidiness.

"Oh, I'm going to tidy up a bit, some of my own

clothes, I think."

"Will I bring any more work back from auntie?"

"No."

"She'll wonder. Will you be going over yourself soon?"

"I'll see; but I don't want any work back to-day. Oh, tell her she ought to charge two pounds for the blanket, there's a lot of work in it."

"All right," said Jean, and turned down the stairs. Lily followed her, and even accompanied her to the door.

"Good-bye, then, Jean; you'll be home by six or so, I suppose?"

"Likely. Good-bye."

The impulse was on Lily to kiss her sister, but a proceeding so unusual was certain to create some fresh suspicion, so she refrained.

"I'm vexed if I've been cross, Jean; I didn't mean

it ever, mind that."

Jean stood still on the mat in the dim, half-lighted landing, oddly arrested by the words. It was a very unemotional house, and the happenings of each day, the little lapses of courtesy and of temper, were always permitted to pass without remark and certainly without apology.

"What's the matter with you, Lily? Are you well enough?"

"Oh, yes; never was better. Give my love to

Auntie Bell-"

She closed the door rather suddenly, because she beheld her bête-noire Jemima Bain coming out of the opposite door, and did not want to parley with her.

Jean had the company of her friend part of the way to the school, but Lily's words recurred to her after she was within, and again as she walked across the town to Hanover Street. She arrived at the shop about halfpast four, just her aunt's tea time. The little errand girl was behind the counter, and Jean nodded to her as

she passed in.

Now, Jean did not like the shop; in fact, like her father, she was secretly ashamed of it, though she always felt when there that sense of comfort inseparable from what is called "a good way of doing". The shop was as full as it could hold of dainty goods, temptingly arranged, while the back room was the very picture of solid comfort. By her cosy fireside Miss Oliphant was enjoying her afternoon cup of tea, after a particularly fine business day. A good many Edinburgh ladies knew that little back room, and some of the more privileged customers had tasted Miss Oliphant's fine brew. Also more than one burden had been unfolded there, and had been eased by the quick sympathy and commonsense of the woman who had been able to live the solitary existence and yet keep herself in touch with life at every point.

She bade Jean good afternoon pleasantly enough,

though she would rather have seen Lily any day.

"You're a sicht for sair een, Jean; it's fower months the morn since ye were here," she said, as she motioned her to a chair.

"Dear me, do you write down the dates, auntie?"

"No, but I've a lang memory for that kind o' things; I can aye tell hoo lang a customer has been o' comin'

back. It's the secret o' guid business, to mind things.

Hoo's Lily?"

"Weel enough," said Jean, but her tone had a dry note in her aunt's estimation, and she pricked up her ears.

"I havena seen her since the nicht o' the mission tea.

Was she ony the waur o't?"

"No; she enjoyed it. That's the sofa blanket; she finished it to-day. I'm only about half through with mine."

"Next week will do. My, it's a beauty; she has done

it splendidly."

"Yes, it's very nice; and as long as I mind, she said you should charge two guineas for it. There's a lot o' work in it."

"It widna be dear at twa, but we'll see. The Americans dinna like to pay ower much; and Mrs. Jackson's, that set the fashion, was only thirty shillin's."

Jean hung it over the chair back and admired its pretty colouring and the perfect shape of the silken thistles.

"You never see a sofa blanket in this country now. Maybe the old fashion is coming back."

"Maybe; but sit ye doon, Jean, an' I'll mak' a fresh

cup o' tea. Hoo's the auld man?"

"Quite well, but tired, auntie, I can see that. I wish we had money enough to let him get a holiday at

Christmas; he needs it."

"If he wad live like ither folk," said Miss Oliphant severely, "an' tak' fresh air insteid o' sittin' for ever at books, he wad be better. Here's your tea. And Lily's weel, is she? I haven a seen her for more than a week."

Jean ate a morsel of bread and took several drinks of tea before he spoke. She wished to tell her aunt about the glove episode; but her natural reserve and fear of her aunt taking any drastic measures alone deterred her. But at last the desire to discuss what had been occupying her thoughts so continuously for the past week overcame these scruples.

"Auntie, have you noticed anything unusual lately

about Lily?"

"A wee dowie; yes; she needs a holiday, too, I

dinna doubt, but winna get it."

"Oh, I think she is well enough in her health, but she has something on her mind."

"Whit kind o' a thing?"

"Well, I hardly like to tell, for I am ashamed of it, and it has troubled me a lot," said Jean, her colour heightening a little; but presently she summoned her courage and related to her aunt the incident of that momentous afternoon. Momentous, because she felt that it marked an epoch in their lives, just as Ted's blunt announcement that he had taken his passage to New Zealand had marked another epoch, the first breaking away of the family from parental rule. Miss Oliphant's face grew troubled as she listened.

"I dinna like it, no, I dinna like it, Jean, I admit, but still it may be a' richt; Lily's neither a bairn nor

a fool."

"But she has kept it so dark, auntie."

"Weel, but that's nateral in the circumstances, an' you're no a speakin' family," she answered calmly. "It is nateral for a lassie to have a jo; in fact, it's what should be, an' if I had my life to begin ower again, lass, I'd enter the mairret state. The happiest? No; seldom that; but it's what the Creator ordained, and it's mair satisfying. But that's neither here nor there. What are we to do aboot Lily? Weel, naething, so far as I can see, at the present moment."

"Would you not speak to her next time she comes over? She is very fond of you; I daren't, you see,

she snaps my head off."

"There's something wrang, I can see; it's no' a' fair an' square, or there widna be this need o' hidin' things.

Your faither may be what he likes, but I canna think he'd stand in the way if a decent man came along for either of ye."

"It would depend," said Jean with a sigh. "It would depend on what he was. Do you mind Maxwell

that was the assistant in Greyfriars?"

"I saw him once."

"Well, he took to coming; and father just told us, or at least me, for I think it was me he suspected, that it wouldn't do."

"What for?" asked Miss Oliphant brusquely. "He

was a decent lad, and wad hae got on."

"Yes, but his father was a postman, and that was

enough."

"Humph!" said Miss Oliphant in high disdain. "Adam was a gardener; and what was your grandfaither?—in the navy, your faither's fond sayin', but he was only an artificer, a kind o' upper engineman, if I dinna mistake. Oh, this silly pride! I tell ye it sickens

me, I canna get takin' my tea for it."

At the same time she regarded her niece with a kindliness she had never before felt for her. There was a certain wistfulness on the girl's somewhat hard face which smote the elder woman with keen compassion. She had lived fifty years of the solitary life, and knew its limitations, and she understood what it must be to a girl to see her youth passing, sacrificed to a mere chimera.

"Your faither's waur than I thocht, Jean, an' it's time I was on the warpath again. I'll come ower to my tea on Sunday. There's my bell! Are you off already?

There's nae hurry. I'll no' be keepit lang."

"I think I'll go. I don't like to leave Lily much alone since that day, and I want to get on with the blanket. You won't say anything to her about what I've told you? She'd be very angry. You have no idea how bitter she was that day, we—we nearly quarrelled."

"Weel, it wadna hae hurt ye if ye made it up

again. This shutting up everything inside's bad, Jean, thoroughly bad, and there must be a fell explosion some day. Keep your spirits up, an' if Maxwell comes along again, come to me."

"Oh, he won't; he's engaged to Miss Curtis, at Causewayside School, and he's got a fine place up North, and they're to be married in the Easter holi-

days."

"Oh!" said Miss Oliphant with a small snort. "But there micht be ither Maxwells. Guid nicht, lass. I'm pleased to see ye, and I'll be ower on Sunday. No' a cheep to your faither, in case he gangs oot. It's him I want to see."

Jean nodded and went out by the house door to the little passage at the side. It was quite dark now, but the brilliantly lighted shops tempted her, and she walked the whole length of Princes Street, east first, and then west again, surveying the tempting windows with all a woman's eagerness, thinking what she would buy if she had money to spend on fine frocks and hats, and all the dainty appurtenances of a lady's life. Jean had fine taste, and with rare good sense adhered strictly to the plain, well-made coat and skirt—the garment par excellence for the woman of limited means.

She was extremely dainty in a kind of stiff, precise way about all her belongings, affecting the plain linen collar and neat tie, whereas Lily loved laces and chiffons

and a more fussy style of dress.

In the fascinating study and various thoughts of the might-have-been, perhaps even of the "might-be," which her aunt's ready sympathy had awakened, she managed to spend a whole pleasant hour on the way home.

It was nearly seven when she turned into Ardmillan Street. She came up on the opposite side, and, glancing up at the windows, observed that they were all dark. It did not disturb her, however; she guessed that her father had not come home yet, and that probably Lily

was working in the kitchen, to which they often retired in the evening, finding it the warmest place in the house. Having no latchkey, she had to ring the bell at the stair foot; but there came no response. She continued ringing until some one drew up the door and let her in. By this time she was a little nettled, as most people are when kept waiting outside a door.

As she ascended the stairs looking up, she presently descried the face of her friend Jemima Bain, her red

hair gleaming under the gas-lamp.

"Oh, it's you, Jean. I heard the bell, an' come out.

Lily's out. See what she has left in the door."

Jean took the last steps at a bound, and glued her eyes on to the scrap of paper pinned over the keyhole.

"The key is under the mat," was the legend written

on it.

"Lily must be mad to do that," cried Jean breathlessly. "Why, anybody might have got into the house."

"She hasn't been gone more than ten minutes or so,

and, Jean, she went away in a cab."

Jean stared, and her face became white as death. Without a thought of the rudeness she was guilty of towards her friend, and resenting her prying curiosity and her suggestive look, she fitted the latch-key in the door, went into the house and banged the door after her.

CHAPTER VII

THE DARKENED HOUSE

THE lobby was quite dark, of course, and Jean had to grope about for the matches. She broke up the fire in the parlour, the glow enabling her to find the matches on the mantelpiece. Then she lit the gas, and looked round dazedly. Everything was in order, the newspaper even, with her father's pipe and tobaccolying on the corner of the table, in readiness for him when he should come in. She ran to the kitchen; the same order prevailed; the house was as neat as a new pin, not a thing out of its place.

Upstairs she ran in a futile search, her eyes roaming about in hopes that they would light on something to

explain the mystery of Lily's flight.

Nothing but silence welcomed and surrounded her. She entered the bedroom they shared together, and threw open the wardrobe door. The side usually occupied by her sister's garments was almost empty; she opened the two upper drawers in the chest which stood against the opposite wall; they also had been denuded of everything except a few old things. A big trunk that had been wont to stand against the wall, covered with chintz, was gone, too, and the cover lay folded neatly on the bed. There was no disorder nor any sign of haste or confusion. She was at her wits' end, and the thought of her father's return filled her with dismay.

The house felt so empty and strange, almost as if

there had been a death in it. She looked round vainly for some scrap of paper that might throw light on the disappearance, but nothing of the kind was to be seen. Presently she thought of Jemima, who had seen the cab drive away, and she went out to the landing, and knocked at the opposite door.

Jemima opened it herself, looking slightly indignant, but her natural and insatiable curiosity speedily asserted

itself.

"You did snap my head off, Jean," she said drily. "After all, you needn't have been so rude, after me taking the trouble to let you in. You might have rung

there long enough."

"I know. I didn't mean it, Jemima," said Jean very meekly for her. "I'm at my wits' end about Lily. She can't have gone to Auntie Bell's, because I've just come from there, besides she's taken all her clothes

away."

"No!" cried Jemima with the liveliest interest, scenting a romance more exciting than any of the penny dreadfuls with which she regaled her too abundant leisure. "But, Jean, there wasn't a box on the cab, for I particularly looked. I heard it rumble up to the door, and ran to look out for fear it might be the doctor for Mrs. Carstairs. You know, they have been expecting to need him there for over a week. When I saw the cab I just waited at the dining-room window. You can see pretty well, but not the person that comes or goes into the cab. Another inch further out, and you could see everything. What a mistake the builder made! And there was no luggage on it, so I concluded that it was the Rattrays away to the theatre. You know how gay they are. They've been three times out in cabs this week."

"Jemima Bain, I don't know how you can bother your head about the folk that live in the stair," cried

Jean a trifle aghast at this copious recital.

"Oh, I like it; it's as good's a play to watch them.

I say, Jean, do you think it possible now that Lily's run away with that gentleman that came the other afternoon, the gentleman of the gloves?"

Jean shook her head, too miserable to resent the

suggestion.

"I don't know what to think. And what father will

say, I am afraid to think."

"Look here, Jean, the box went away in the morning on Sim's, the greengrocer's, barrow; I saw him wheel it away, and wondered, but I never dreamt of Lily. She must have helped him out with it herself, see? It will be quite easy to find out from him where he took it. Shall I run down to Sim's now?"

At that moment they heard the door at the stair foot

bang, and Jean rushed back to her own door.

"Father, Jemima. What he'll say I can't think. Shut the door. He's always angry when he sees us

speaking on the stairhead."

Both girls ran in, and shut their respective doors, and Jean even permitted her father to open theirs again with his own key. Seven o'clock rang at the moment; she counted the strokes where she stood at the parlour table with her hand resting on it, her face a curious study. For the moment her whole concern, more engrossing even than her anxiety about her sister, was wonder as to how her father would receive the news.
"It's a fine night," he observed as he came into the

"I walked the whole way from Rankeillour Street, and I feel the better for it. We don't take enough exercise, I believe. We must start some Saturday rambles again." When she did not reply he looked at her sharply, and was struck by her stage attitude and

the expression on her face.

"What's the matter? Where's Lily?"

"Lily's away, father," she answered in a low voice.

"Away? Where?"

"I don't know, but she is away. I've just come in from Auntie Bell's, and found the house empty, a bit of paper over the keyhole saying the key was under the mat, and it appears she left in a cab about twenty minutes ago."

She did not mention Jemima's name because her father hated the girl, and would not suffer her in the house.

"A cab twenty minutes ago! What on earth are

you talking about, Jean?"

"I'm telling you what has happened," she said with a note of desperate tension in her voice. "For some reason or other Lily has run away, and she does not mean to come back, for she has taken all her clothes."

Edward Morison stared at his daughter blankly, as if

he did not comprehend what she was driving at.

"But what would she do that for?" he asked stupidly, like one who has some apparently unsolvable puzzle presented for the first time.

"Ask me another," said Jean tartly. "What do girls usually run away for? Of course, Lily's gone

away with some man."

Her father's dense stupidity angered her as she had never been angered in her life before, and she did not care what effect her words might have. But even she felt a little frightened when she saw the colour and expression on his face. He clenched his fist, and brought it down on the table.

"Say that again, Jean Morison, and I'll fell you.

How could a girl of mine do such a thing?"

"She's done it," said Jean sullenly. "And I'm not surprised. I've even been expecting it ever since—ever

"Ever since what? You're in this plot, this infernal mystery," he said, and would have gripped her by the arm, only she promptly put the breadth of the table between them. He was a big, stolid, self-contained man, slow to anger, but once roused that anger was terrible to see. Jean had only seen it once before, on the night Ted had "had it out," as he expressed it, with his father before he left for New Zealand. And

it had been an experience she had not desired to see

repeated.

But she took her courage in both hands, and, realising that it was her duty to acquaint her father with all she knew concerning her sister, she briefly told him about the visit of the mysterious stranger to Lily that afternoon when she was alone.

Her father's eyes dilated, his bosom heaved, and his

voice when he spoke was thick, almost inarticulate.

"You stand there in cold blood, and tell me this has been going on in the house, and you never told me a word. You're as bad as she is. I'll be done with both of you. Was ever man cursed with a set of such ungrateful children!"

Jean never spoke a word. She was not afraid, and a thousand passionate rebellious thoughts crowded upon her lips for utterance. She only kept them back by a mighty effort, realising that it would only add fuel to

the flame.

"I don't blame her altogether," she said in a low voice. "We've had a miserable life here; even I have felt it. We have none of the things other girls have; nothing but work, work, work, and poverty. Lily got sick of it."

Morison could hardly believe his ears as he listened to these words, which stabbed him to the heart. They amazed him, too. Surely this was the hour of his great awakening.

When he spoke again it was in a voice of curious calm, very different from his former frenzied accents.

"What do you mean, girl? You are blaming me me that has never done you an ill turn, that has given you all I have. Explain to me, if you can, what fires are these."

"I am saying the truth, father," answered Jean almost afraid of the fire she had kindled. "But that does not make it any easier. We must find her, find her, and bring her back."

He gave his head an impatient, determined shake.

"This—this man," he said, getting out the word with difficulty—"have you any idea who he is?"

"None, absolutely none. I never even saw him, or

knew that Lily had made his acquaintance."

"He may have been coming here long enough for all we know."

Jean nodded.

"She must have seen him often before it would come to this. Well, she has disgraced us, and ruined my reputation in Edinburgh. She must go her own way. How do you think I'm to hold up my head to-morrow among them, knowing what has happened?"

"Perhaps she will be married, father."

He laughed, and the sound made Jean shiver.

"An honest man, lass, that wants to marry a woman doesn't take her away from her father's house in the dark unknown to anybody. No, whoever he is he is a scoundrel, and as a scoundrel deserves to be punished. But I'll leave him and her as well; their own punishment probably will be enough. She's dead to me, and you'll never mention her name in this house again, Jean. Do you hear?"

"Father, she's my own sister, my only sister Lily,

and I will never rest till I find her."

"I forbid you," he thundered. "She has not considered us; she has ruined us. We'll need to leave Edinburgh. How could the name of Morison be respected after such a thing? And in this vile, common stair everybody knows what happens. That red-haired harpy that lives opposite, that Bain girl, depend upon it, has it at the finger-ends already."

Jean winced, remembering what had already passed

between her and Jemima Bain.

"Go away and leave me to myself," he said. "And remember I don't want to hear her name mentioned in this house again. Will your Aunt Isabel not be able to throw any light on this? She's good at aiding and abetting everything that's against me."

"I was there this afternoon, and stopped to tea.

Auntie Bell knows nothing about it."

"I would question that very much, but I'll deal with her later on. Bring me a glass of whisky, and leave me

alone. I'm-I'm upset."

Jean did as she was bid, and closed the parlour door, her mouth set in a long bitter line. For there had been no word of sympathy for her, who was bereft in a sense he could not understand. They had had their little passages-at-arms as sisters will, but there never had been any serious difference between them in all the years they had spent together. Jean had realised the depth of her affection for her sister that day, when the first anxiety concerning her had gnawed at her heart.

She was just about to shut herself into the kitchen, feeling ready for a good cry, when there came a low, very low, tap at the door. She recognised it as Jemima's tap, thus modulated always when she supposed Morison to be in the house. Jean ran out, and

very softly opened the door about three inches.

"I only came to say I'd been down to Sim's, the greengrocer's, and that the boy took the box to the Caledonian Station. Looks as if she had gone away by train, doesn't it?"

Jean nodded, whispered "Thank you" under her breath, then put her finger to her lip, and significantly jerked her head backwards towards the parlour door.

Jemima, perfectly understanding, said "Good night,"

and slipped away.

CHAPTER VIII

PLAIN SPEECH

AS Jean closed to the door as softly as she had opened it, her father suddenly came out of the parlour.

"Who was that?" he asked harshly.

Jean hesitated a moment, almost afraid to answer. It seemed to her that even in those brief moments her father's face had changed. He looked like an old, old man.

"Who was it?" he repeated in a tone which made

her answer him at once.

"Jemima Bain."

"What did she want?"

"She saw Lily going away," she said in a low voice.

"Of course, nobody could go out or come into this or any house in the stair and she would not know," he

said scathingly. "What did she say?"

"She came to tell me that Lily did not take her box away in a cab, but that Sim's, the greengrocer's, laddie took it in his barrow to the Caledonian Station in the afternoon."

"It's a wonder," he said in a quiet, furious voice, "that she did not run after the cab. Just step in, will

ye, an' ask her?"

Jean, who had now more than she could bear, broke away from him, and ran into the kitchen, where she banged the door.

Morison stood looking after her dazedly, and passed

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his hand across his brow. Then he took down his hat, forgetting his overcoat, though it was a cold night, and left the house. Jean heard him go with wonder and relief, and, opening the door, began to wander through the house again.

But it was dreary work. The walls seemed to shut her in. She felt that she would go crazy if she stayed

a moment longer.

She put on her things, too, and went out, taking care to leave the door on the latch. Jemima Bain, listening intently next door, heard them both go, and with her accustomed rapidity put two and two together. She knew more than she had told as yet; she was biding her time. Gilbert Horne had not come up and down that stair half-a-dozen times for nothing, and once she had followed Lily right out to the Blackford Hill, and seen them meet. But it was not her business yet to speak. They had not treated her very well, and Morison looked at her as if she were dirt when he met her.

Jean walked to the Caledonian Station, which she reached in about ten minutes' time. She pondered the thing as she passed along the brightly-lighted street, puzzled by some of its aspects. She could not understand why Lily, having sent her box in advance, should have driven to the station, unless some one had called

to take her away.

It seemed absurd, and, if secrecy were their object,

the most likely way to attract attention.

The big terminus station was busy as usual, some of the evening trains preparing to go out. One bound for Liverpool was getting steam up, but only passengers were permitted on the platform. Jean ran forward. What if Lily were in that, bound for the great port, and thence to some inaccessible part of the world? She tried to pass through the barrier, but the ticket collector stopped her.

"Oh, if you please; it's very important," she pleaded.

"I want to see somebody who may be going by this

train, and it's my last chance."

"You're the second that has said that. The last was a man. It's against the rules, but you can gang through."

"An old man?" said Jean arrested by his words.

"So-so, auld enough to be your faither onywey.

What's up? Somebody run awa'?"

"Ay," answered Jean, and passed on quickly. She made a thorough examination of every compartment from end to end, but in vain. Some of the passengers resented her cool, eager stare, and one man banged the door on her; but Jean went up and down taking no heed, and having satisfied herself that Lily was not in the train she retraced her steps back to the main hall.

The cloakroom was her next chance, and her step quickened as she sought the counter to make the neces-

sary inquiry.

"Did a boy with a barrow leave a box here about an hour ago, an old-fashioned box, like a kist, you know, painted green?"

The man stolidly shook his head.

"Jist come on, miss. I couldna say." Seeing her keen disappointment he called to one Bill to come out from the interior.

"Ask him. He's been here since denner-time."

Jean repeated her query, and was answered in the

"I mind the box fine. It was very heavy; name o' Morison on it. An' the laddie, too—an impident speldron. I gied him wan in the lug."

"Who took it out?"

"A gentleman took it oot aboot an 'oor ago. No, he wasna gaun by the train. We took it to a cab. I didna stop to hear the direction, but I saw a leddy inside."

Jean turned away sick at heart, her worst fears con-

 \mathbf{firmed} .

"Been a Gretna Green affair, Jamie," said the man

when she was out of hearing. "She's the second that's askit: the ither yin was the faither, and he lookit as black as thunder. Ye see life here, lad, I can tell ye, if ye keep yer een open."

A grin overspread Jamie's somewhat vacuous face,

but he made no remark.

The clue being lost, there was no use in lingering in that big empty place, so suggestive of possibilities. It was a small comfort to know that at least Lily had not left the city, unless she had driven to another station. Auntie Bell was Jean's next thought, and she jumped into a car to take her to the corner of Hanover Street. Her father had carried out precisely the same programme, and as Jean left the Caledonian Station he was knocking at his sister-in-law's door. The shop was closed, but he would not have gone in by the shop door. He had never entered it in his life.

The little errand girl had gone out with the last parcels, and Miss Oliphant's maid, Wilhemina Brown,

opened the door.

"Is Miss Oliphant at home?" he asked without so

much as bidding her good evening.

"I'm no'sure. I'll see," replied Wilhemina gingerly, and leaving the door half ajar went back into the house. She knew perfectly well that her mistress was in; she had just taken in her supper; but she was not prepared to offer any courtesy to a man who did not know how to behave himself, "nae gentleman" as she called him afterwards when reprimanded by her mistress for her breach of good manners.

"That's Morison, mem," she said putting her head

inside the sitting-room door.

"Morison! Maister Morison, Willimeenie. How dare ye leave him on the doorstep? Bring him in instanter!"

The squat little figure disappeared with somewhat reluctant feet, and in a moment more Morison came stalking up the stairs. Miss Oliphant had a very com-

fortable flat above her shop. She took the good of her means, and gave the rest away liberally. She had already made a small provision for her old age, but hoped she would die in harness, when her nieces under her will would receive all that was left, with the exception of a small weekly pension to Wilhemina, whom she had rescued from the slums, and converted into a useful member of society.

"Good evening, Miss Oliphant," he said formally.

"Is Lily here?"

"Lily! No, I havena seen her for a week, but Jean was here this afternoon, and had her tea wi' me."

"It's Lily I'm seekin'. She's—she's left home seem-

ingly. I thought you might know."

Miss Oliphant's comely face looked aghast. She was struck too by the appearance of Morison, which was that of a stricken man. He had neither overcoat nor gloves, though usually punctilious to a degree regarding his clothes, and his face seemed to be lined and seamed with some inward pain. He pushed his long fingers through his grey hair, which had a limp disordered look, as if it had strayed from its accustomed prim order.

"Ye mean, I suppose, that she's run awa'?" she

said quickly.

He nodded, and seemed to look dully round the room.

"There's been something going on, some—some underhand love affair," he said, a dull red flush rising to his face. "I have got but scanty particulars, but her sister, it seems, knew she had a lover, and never told me. He has even been in the house in the afternoons when Lily was alone. She has not told you anything about it then?"

"Not she, but—but noo ye speak aboot it, I'm no'

surprised--

"What do you mean?" asked Morison sharply.

Miss Oliphant proceeded to explain that she had observed certain signs of restlessness about Lily lately.

Morison listened with darkening brow.

"If you noticed all you say it was your duty, Isabel, to have communicated your suspicion to me. Nobody has considered me in this affair, though I shall be the chief sufferer. You have always posed as a good friend to me and mine, and your advice had not lacked. Do you think you have done your duty this time?"

"Don't lecture me, Morison, for I'll no stand it," she replied clearly. "You an' me's never sailed in the same boat, and though I'm sorry for ye now, at the same time I can tell ye ye have yoursel' to blame for whatever

may have happened to Lily."

He glared at her, but was cowed by the steadfast expression of her eye. Also some inner consciousness gnawing at his heart told him she was right. He had got his due, nothing more, for when had he considered anybody but himself all these years, when he had been worshipping false gods, that had nothing but disappointment in return for the offering of a life?

"You have no right to make such remarks to me. I know you have had your knife in me ever since Katie died. You looked at me that day as if I had killed

her "

"So you did, wi' your stinking, wicked pride," she cried, letting herself go. "Oh, man, can ye no see it for yoursel'? Ye hae prided yoursel' on your position, never haein' common sense to mak' the best of it, nor the courage to be what ye are, and what a' the world kens ye are, an ordinary workin' man. You've tried to be a gentleman in the wrang way, an' you've failed. What's come o't? Your bairns have suffered. Many a time has Lily been weeping in this hoose, and though Jean said less she has the wearifu' look. Wha gied you the richt to say, an' it was dune? Man, d'ye no ken that there's but one arbiter o' human destiny, and that's the Lord God Almichty?"

Morison bowed his head under this torrent, in no

way touched, but powerless to stand against it.

"If that is all you have to say to a man in distress I may go," he said sullenly, turning towards the door.

"Dinna be in sic a hurry, Morison. I've had my say, an' fine ye ken my bark's waur than my bite. Sit doon, an' let's talk the thing ower. Has nane o' ye ony idea wha the man is?"

"No, I thought my daughters would be above that sort of thing," said Morison, with a sort of wounded, lofty look, which freshly exasperated the big human

heart of Isabel Oliphant.

"They're flesh an' bluid, I suppose, like ither folk," she cried. "Even Jeanie, puir lass, couldna hae her sweetheart because you didna think him guid enough. Yet he was a decent lad, and well doin', an' wad hae made the lassie happy. In the name o' a' that's guid, Morison, what do you think ye are?"

It was not her way or creed to break the bruised reed, but she did not observe in her brother-in-law any signs of penitence, but only a pride which revolted against the blow struck against it. In this doubtless she did him an injustice; indeed, she afterwards owned to it.

Again he turned towards the door.

"Well, I'm off, and so far as I'm concerned I've but one lassie now. If later on she should seek or come to you, you can tell her that."

"God forgive you, Morison," she said, and when he

closed the door she burst into tears.

In the street, a few doors from the shop, he met Jean.

"Going to your aunt's, I suppose; it's no use, you'll get nothing there but ill speech. She's a besom, if ever there was one," he said sourly. "No, Lily has not been there, and apparently she knows nothing about it."

The slight emphasis on the word apparently was not

lost upon Jean.

"I'm sure she knows nothing. I would have found it out this afternoon if she had. I've been at the

station too, and only found out that Lily took the box out of the cloakroom, at least a gentleman did, and they went away in a cab. So, unless they went to another station, Lily is not out of Edinburgh."
"Does it matter?" he asked as if the subject wearied

him. "So far as we are concerned, it is all over. She

has made her bed, and she must lie on it."

"But, father, aren't you going to do anything?" she asked desperately. "We—we must get her back. There are detectives in Edinburgh; we could put them on her track."

"And spend a lot of money needlessly—the money we haven't got," he said gloomily. "Don't you see it

would avail nothing; it would be too late?"

The argument was unanswerable. She shivered as the wind came up from the sea and whirled about them where they stood.

"We'd better go home, lass," he said with an unusual

gentleness-"and forget; that's all that's left."

Jean turned with him, and they mounted the steep ascent with feet that seemed to have weights attached. It was nothing to the weight that lay like lead upon their hearts.

CHAPTER IX

THE FLIGHT

MEANWHILE she who had caused all this anguish of heart was on her way to her destination. The cab in which she left Ardmillan Street drew up at the entrance to the Caledonian Station, where Gilbert Horne was waiting. He immediately got the box out, and took his place beside her.

Before they left the somewhat quiet precincts of Rut-

land Street he turned to her with some tenderness.

"You look cold, Lily, your face is so white. Cheer

up, the worst is over."

"Is it?" she said faintly, as she leaned against the back of the cab, and closed her eyes. "It seemed awful to steal away like that, far worse even than I expected."

"You can go back yet," he suggested, and had she been less distraught with her own feelings she might

have thought his tone a trifle eager.

"What's the use of saying that? What's done can't be undone, and it is impossible. I could stop there no

longer."

"You'll cheer up when you get home," he said quickly, choosing the word with wonderful tact. "And don't forget what a job I've had. What'll happen to me to-morrow, Heaven only knows. I have broken three engagements to-day for you. At this moment I ought to be dining at home, and getting ready to take my sister to a party."

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"You can go yet," she said with rather a snap in her voice. She felt hurt, sore, entirely out of tune with her lover and her surroundings. It had been harder than she had expected to throw off all the old trammels and take the final plunge, and she drearily wondered what compensation would be hers now she had done it. Imagination and memory began to clothe the life she had left with a thousand attributes she had never found while enduring it. She felt nothing but tenderness and a longing indescribable towards all she had left.

"It's a jolly nice little place, and you'll soon get accustomed to it," he said, as they turned into Princes Street. "Remember, I've had a lot of trouble too; in

fact, I have a lot more to lose than you."

"Have you?" she asked. "I should doubt that

very much.

"I have though, for when my father discovers it, it will be just touch and go whether he chucks me out. Then a nice mess we'd be in, eh, Lily?"

"Anything would be better than this horrible concealment," she said feverishly. Horne took out his

watch and calculated the time.

"A quarter to eight. We'll get down by half-past. It was better to drive after all. They're so confoundedly prying about stations, and somebody is certain to see you. Now, you understand, I shall not be able to come down very often. And you're not going to be trouble-some and unreasonable, are you, Lily?"

"I'll try not to be for two months," she answered.
"You promised that in two months you would tell your

father."

"That depends, and you won't write to your people in that time? I assure you if this mine were sprung on him at this moment nothing would save us."

"I'll wait," she said quietly, "as I said, for two

months."

"It's rather a good joke us running out of Edinburgh like this. Not much romance in it, though. All the

romance in these things is in the imagination. The real thing's a vastly different story. Cheer up, old girl, and remember that a man can't long stand a face like that. After all, I've done all you want, and I'm sure that very few chaps in Edinburgh would have been so reasonable."

"What I don't understand is why you could not have

told them at the beginning," she said jealously.

"There now, you've begun to harp back on that old string," he said wearily. "Have we got to go over all the old ground again?"

"Well, it means a lot to me, you see, you don't

understand."

"And nothing at all to me, I suppose?" he said gloomily. "Commend me to a woman for selfish-

"I don't mean to be selfish, Gilbert," she said, realising that perhaps in her own interest she was pursuing

the wrong tack.

"Well, it sounds mighty like it," he said grandly. "Just think what a sacrifice I'm making for you, and the trouble I've taken to get a place to your liking. I must say you haven't given me much thanks."

"I am grateful, but very miserable, Gilbert."

"Well, you haven't got anything to be so very miserable about," he said with the same superior air. "Now you're going to a little home of your own you ought to perk up a bit. This is not the girl that stole my heart

away that day on the Blackford Braes."

She smiled a little, and tried to brighten for his sake. She realised that now she had taken the irrevocable step; the man at her side represented destiny to her—and she might as well make the best of destiny. She was beginning to know him better, and to understand what he liked and disliked. It might be better for herself in the end to cultivate a bright face, even if her inward thoughts would have dictated a gloomy one. She laughed suddenly as they swept past the busy corner of

the Register House, where there were throngs of people, and all the stir and hum of city life at one of its con-

verging points.

"What a lark to be running away like this! Just think if anybody saw us. It isn't very romantic, as you say. In the old days they rode in a coach and four, or the lady on a pillion behind. An old cab and a kind of broken-winded horse takes all the romance out of it."

"I don't think he's broken-winded. I looked to that, and he's going at a pretty good pace. Don't you think Portobello a good move? They'd never think of looking for us there, a kind of God-forsaken place, I always

think."

So in talk more or less animated they presently left the outskirts of the city behind, and came upon the quiet length of country road, all that is left of the green plateau which used to lie between Edinburgh and the sea. It was dark there; the lamps planted at long distances seemed only to accentuate the gloom, and the rattle of the car bells in the distance had an unreal sound. Lily drew a little closer to her companion, and he put his arm about her. Convinced of his own stupendous folly, having got his life into a tangle that would have appalled even a braver man, Gilbert Horne, by reason of a certain lightness of disposition, was enabled to shut out the disagreeable side of things, and to enjoy the experience. The cab journey had not been his suggestion or desire; nay, he had impressed upon Lily that it would have been much safer and more prudent for her to go quietly out by train, he following when convenient.

But she had remained firm, and he, afraid to defy or annoy her, had been obliged to give in. He had arranged it all for a certain day, forgetting that he was under promise to attend a party at the Inglises house in Moray Place. He was in hopes that he might be able to get there still, though late, and had taken the precaution to bring his evening suit up to his Club in Princes Street.

Presently the cheerful glow of the lights in the little seaside town welcomed them, and in a few minutes they reached their destination, a small cottage house of the old-fashioned sort standing back in a long garden at the very point where Portobello ends and Joppa begins.

They were evidently expected, for, as soon as the cab stopped, the door was thrown open, and a small, quaint, elderly woman, with a row of curls on either side of her lace cap, appeared on the doorstep.

A small trellised porch stood out over the door and helped to break the force of the wind which swept up

from the sea.

"Here we are, Miss Fiddes," cried Gilbert as they approached the door, leaving the man to bring in the box. "Rather late, I'm afraid, but safe and sound."

"Glad to see you, Mr. Gilbert, and Mrs. Gilbert, too," she said, bobbing a queer little curtsey, which seemed to bring back the flavour of long ago. "Come in, my dear; everything is ready, even your supper, and there is a warm, bright fire."

Lily thanked her in a monosyllable, and stepped into

the low doorway.

The sitting-room door was open, and certainly the place, with its old-fashioned furniture and tall candles alight on the mantelpiece, looked inviting and homely

enough.

"Oh, Gibbie, isn't it nice?" she exclaimed, looking round in genuine pleasure. She had seen the place in the daytime, when it looked plain and bare and meagre; the glow of the fire and the red curtains drawn across the latticed window made a wonderful difference.

Miss Fiddes was a maiden lady of small means, who after a struggle with her pride had decided to let off a part of her house. They had seen the small card in her window as they walked through the street on a Saturday afternoon, and liking the quiet, retired look of

the cottage, with its high laurel hedge, shutting it off from the road, they had gone in, with the result that Gilbert had taken the rooms furnished for three

months.

He felt that the step was suicidal as far as he was concerned, but he had no choice, since Lily had given him the ultimatum. What he expected was going to happen in two months he could not have told; he hoped that something would turn up. Lily had stood by his side that day while he told quite glibly a great many lies about their position. He gave his name as Gilbert, and explained to the unsuspicious Miss Fiddes that he was a commercial traveller, hardly ever at home, which was the reason he did not have a house for his young wife meanwhile.

She had been very sympathetic, and said she would do her best to be kind to Mrs. Gilbert, and to keep her from finding the time long. And though she had fancied she asked a high rental for her rooms, it was readily paid a month in advance, which made the little spinster

feel very rich indeed.

The house was immaculately clean, and had a quaint charm which even Gilbert felt. He smiled to himself a trifle broadly as he looked round the room when Miss

Fiddes went out to get the coffee.

Lily threw her hat down on the floor and leaned back in the low basket chair, and seemed as if she were completely worn out. A big black cat, with a fine sweeping tail, came into the room in stately fashion, and presently, with a little purring noise, jumped on her lap.

"A black cat; that's for luck, Gibbie. I wonder

whether he'll bring luck to you and me?"

Miss Fiddes came into the room at the moment, with the steaming coffee-pot in her hand, and at the sight of the cat's condescension, smiled, well pleased.

"I feel as if I had got a written recommendation, Mrs. Gilbert," she said in her bird-like voice. "for Jeremiah is very particular. There are some people he won't look at."

As if to corroborate this, Jeremiah gazed at Gilbert

and spat fire.

"There, there, Jerry, don't be rude. I'm sorry he does not like gentlemen; you see, there never has been one in this house since my dear father died, and Jerry was only a kitten then," said Miss Fiddes apologetically.

"It's all right, I don't like cats, ma'am. Doubtless, there's a mutual antipathy," said Gilbert easily.

When the door closed he placed a chair for Lily at

the table, and drew in his own.

"Cold ham and coffee; a curious mixture. Come and eat, Lil. I don't know what you are, but I'm famished. Had nothing since my chop at the works at

She took the chair he offered, but it was Gilbert who poured out the coffee. She had often pictured what it would be like to have a little home, and wait upon him as a woman waits upon the man she loves. The reality was very different. The place was ideal enough, but something lacked.

"I suppose you won't let me off to-night, because of that party?" he said after a moment. "I'll get into

awful hot water by not turning up."

She shook her head.

"I won't stop here by myself, Gilbert. What would

Miss Fiddes say?"

She spoke quite determinedly. Gilbert lifted the big coffee cup to his lips, and took a long drink. He had no choice. The morrow must take care of itself.

CHAPTER X

THE WALK IN THE SNOW

GILBERT HORNE, Senior, the head of the Bonnygate Works, invariably, unless the weather were quite prohibitive, walked from the works to his home on the Cramond Road at the close of his working day.

The length of day varied with the claims of business, but it was never within the limits of nine or ten hours.

It was a long walk, and his sons did not often accompany him. Occasionally Walter, the elder son, when the evening was fine, would take the walk from a sense of duty. He and his father were very good friends, because Walter was a conscientious man, and did his duty faithfully. That he was not a success as a business man

was his misfortune rather than his fault.

He had been born a student and a scholar, but his father, enthusiastic over the great fabric he had built up, and of which he was very proud, had paid no heed to Walter's somewhat timidly advanced desire to go to college and become a professional man. Horne had pooh-poohed the idea, and had pointed out to Walter at great pains how many very poor professional men they knew, and what a feeble prospect of success there was in any of the professions for the man of mediocre brains. He had long since decided from outward and visible signs that neither of his sons was conspicuously gifted with brains, but that of the two Walter was the least endowed. Gilbert, though smarter, was lazy, and Horne had a grievance against them both. Of the members of

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his family, Horne thought most highly of his girl's ability, and constantly deplored, sometimes audibly in his sons' hearing, that she had not been born a boy.

Horne had been a successful business man, but his life had been one of singular isolation and personal loneliness. It is the fate of the man perhaps who has centred his whole life in business. His wife had died when the children were very young, and he had never married again, though he might have done, and well for himself.

He sometimes wondered of late whether he had not made a mistake in living a solitary life, for he realised that his sons would probably seek homes for themselves. As for Biddy, but newly home from a Continental boarding school, about to have her first season in town, he expected nothing but that she would have suitors by the score, and marry young.

He was a generous father and a fairly just one, though in his estimate of his eldest son he had made

the one grievous mistake of his life.

Walter Horne was now twenty-six years of age, and looked old for his years. He had the absent, studious look, which a good many years' active participation in business had not removed. He had looks of a kind, and his gentle manners won him many friends. But the set in which they moved thought of him somewhat contemptuously as a dreamer, and Horne was often pitied because he had so little help from his sons.

It was a great chemical works, in which there might have been supposed to exist all sorts of scope for scientific research, but it was not a branch of study that appealed to Walter Horne, and he had made no mark on the concern. The best that could be said of him was that he did the routine relegated to him, and caused no anxiety. But he had no initiative, and even his department required the constant supervision of the head.

Gilbert, who had studied chemistry at college, and whose work was in the laboratory, had a better oppor-

tunity, but he was heedless, lazy, and anxious about his own pleasure. So far, indeed, the situation may be summed up by the remark that Horne had little comfort as yet in his sons, and that at an age when most men are able to rest upon their oars, he had still to live the strenuous life, each day full of active work and fresh enterprise.

They were very busy in Christmas week at the works in anticipation of closing down for a few days. Nevertheless, on the last day Horne, getting in his coat in the

little dressing-room, said he would walk home.

"There's a nasty sleet blowing in the wind, father. You'd better drive," said Walter.

"No. I'll walk, but you needn't," said Horne rather brusquely. "Where's Gilbert?"

"He left the laboratory about four o'clock."

"Did he, indeed, and who gave him leave, eh? He's been taking a sight too many afternoons off lately. I'm not going to stand it. I'll just wait till the holidays are over, then I'll have a good straight talk with him."

"Turn up the collar of your coat, sir," said Walter with a solicitous touch, as he glanced through the

window at the driving sleet.

"It won't hurt. There's too much fine china about you young men," said Horne, slightly sarcastic. "I attribute my splendid health to the exercise I take, and it's not a few flakes of snow that'll keep me back. Pray, don't walk. I assure you I need no company."

"I want to come," said Walter quietly.

"All right, come along. It's six, isn't it? Sutherland and Bannerman will stop till nine. I may drive back later. Oh, but I forgot. I've got to take the chair at Grahame Begg's meeting at the Music Hall at eight. That means an early dinner and impaired digestion. Well, well, I suppose it's all in the day's work. I'm beginning to feel, however, that my days are just a trifle long."

He clapped his hat on his head. Walter held open the door, and they passed out. The biting north wind met them, and the snow was whirling in the eddies of the Water of Leith as they crossed the footbridge from the works, and cut across a field path to the main road.

But the fresh wind, the biting caress of the nor'-easter, as it swept up from the freezing firth, sent fresh energy into the elder man, while Walter shivered a little, and wondered at the strange fad which made his father revel in discomfort while a horse and comfortable brougham were to be had for the asking.

"You don't know where Gilbert has gone, I suppose?" said Horne presently, showing by his question what was

uppermost in his mind.

"No, I'm not in his confidence, but possibly he's at

Lord Kilmartin's."

"I should doubt it very much," said Horne slowly. "They were very angry about that premature announcement in the newspapers. It benefited nobody, not even Gilbert, and I'd like to get a hold of the person who put it in. They don't think him good enough, Walter. You know that?"

"I don't see why, then," observed Walter. "Miss

Inglis herself seems pleased enough."

"It's the most surprising thing I've ever heard of, and I tell you frankly I haven't got over it yet. Mary Inglis is a girl in a thousand, intellectual, level-headed, and proud as the heavens. What does she see in Gibbie?"

"He's a favourite with women, I've noticed that,"

said Walter rather lamely.

"It only shows how much discernment they have. He's a slippery customer, is Gilbert. He'd need a wife like Biddy to keep him in order," said Horne curtly, but his mouth softened even as he spoke Biddy's name. He loved his only girl with a passionate love. She was the living image of what her mother had been at her age, and her personality, so brilliant, so charming, so

unexpected, continually awakened his fatherly pride. And she was not only dutiful to him, but willing and eager to give that swift obedience only possible to the highest natures.

"Biddy and he are always bickering," said Walter with an indulgent smile, as if he spoke of two young children. "But I am sure, if the affair with Miss Inglis comes off, it will steady Gilbert as nothing else

could do.'

"The only thing that reconciles me to it, believe me," said Horne. "I don't like the legal set—never did; they give themselves too many airs. They want to inherit the earth. I met Kilmartin yesterday. I always want to call him plain Bob Inglis. We were boys together at Colinton forty years ago, and he tackled me on the subject, not fair and square, but in a sort of roundabout, best counsel sort of way, understand? And it was settlements he was after. I told him frankly that when my sons earned a position they would get it, and that I didn't propose to uphold several big charitable institutions—in a word, a family poorhouse."

"Did you say that actually?"

"I did, and Bob Inglis saw the humour of it. He grinned in his big slow way, and said, 'Always the same old card, Gibbie'. He came nearer being a man at that moment than he has ever been in all his thirty years of legal exaltation."

"Then he's not averse to the thing, or he would have

been nettled?"

"He doesn't care much. I fancy if one could get to the bottom of things, Bob is not so black as he's painted in the matter of pride. He married for ambition one of the Stewarts of Craigie, and it's Mrs. Inglis we shall have to reckon with. I'm not going to make a single move until Gilbert speaks to me frankly. Then we'll have it out."

They had now emerged upon the Cramond Road,

which stretched before them bare and cheerless, the wind whistling through the trees on the one side, and across the bare fields on the other.

Walter put his hand through his father's arm, and unconsciously pressed it. After a moment the pressure

was returned.

"I can rely on you at least, Walter, and after all we can't be born alike," said the elder man with a little sigh. He felt in a bitter, disappointed mood, not the first time by any means, but somehow he was unable to hide it.

"I am sorry I am no good, father. I do my best," said Walter with a slight bitterness in his own voice. "But I've always been the square man in the round hole."

Horne changed the subject at once, because he felt it

had reached the futile stage.

"It's a very wild night, and they'll have it black in the firth to-night. Not many folks abroad. Hulloa, what's that?"

They were at a very lonely part of the road, close in the thick shadow of their own woods, and not more than five hundred yards from the lodge gate at Burton Lea.

Under one of the flaring gas-lamps something was huddled up. As they came forward, they saw to their dismay that it was the figure of a woman lying partially across the path with her face buried on her arms. An empty bottle on the path beside her told its own tale.

"Dead drunk, and not a bobby in sight," said Horne in a tone of extreme disgust. "How on earth did she get here at this time of night? Seems respectably dressed too. What are we to do? We can hardly leave her here, eh?"

"No, or she'll be dead before midnight; it's freezing hard," said Walter, and stooping down he tried to move her round. But she was dead asleep, and he

 ${f c}{
m ould}$ make no impression.

"As full as the Baltic," said Horne, the disgust deepening on his face.

"Here, let's take an arm each, and get her along to the lodge. Mrs. Glass must look after her till William

gets a policeman."

They managed to raise her in their arms, though she was a heavy weight, and hung limp and inert, not helping herself at all. They then saw that she was a middle-aged woman with grey hair and a pleasant-looking face, well dressed but without a bonnet, as if she had escaped from somewhere, with only a shawl wrapped about her head.

Half-dragging, half-carrying her, they managed at last to reach the gates, and knocked on the lodge window as they passed. Instantly Mrs. Glass, who kept the lodge, and was moreover the wife of William, the gardener, and the pattern of respectability, came

out much incensed.

At sight of her master and his son, and the woman between them, she looked aghast.

"Mercy me! What has happened?" she said breath-

lessly.

"A drunken woman, Ann. You must take her in," said her master good-naturedly. "We found her in the road, and if we leave her there she'll be dead before long. Where's William? He must get a policeman."

"He's up at the house, sir. Miss Biddy sent for him, something about flowers for to-morrow night. But can't she stop in the porch, sir? I'm no' very

keen about sic trash in my clean hoose?"

Mrs. Glass had been eleven years housemaid in Burton Lea before her marriage with the good William,

and she was therefore privileged.

"No, no, Mrs. Glass. She must come inside. The floor will wash again," said Horne, understanding her scruples perfectly. The immaculate state of her house had indeed passed into a proverb.

He signed to Walter, and they got her across the

threshold and laid her upon Mrs. Glass's chintz-covered sofa, which stood by the cheerful fire. She regarded the proceedings with the strongest disfavour, but was somewhat relieved to discern that the poor woman did not belong to the tramp or gangrel class, but was well

dressed and thoroughly respectable-looking.

"She'll need to lie here, Ann, until she comes to, or at least until William gets the policeman. Rattray, I suppose, at Cramond Brig will be the nearest. We'll go on to the house, and I'll tell him about it. Don't look so sour, my lass. She's somebody's cross, and you've never been tempted that way. When she wakes up give her a cup of strong tea or coffee, and we'll get her away as soon as we know where she comes from."

"Somebody has a rough row to hoe, lad," he observed to his son as they turned together up the long,

dark avenue which led to the house.

CHAPTER XI

SOMEBODY'S BURDEN

BURTON LEA was an old house, which Horne had modernised for his own convenience. It had a picturesque front, with a curious low, buttressed doorway, and a nail-studded door, of which Biddy was very proud.

It was entirely covered with ivy, which always gives that comfortable clothed look, and can render beautiful a building commonplace in itself. A shaft of warm light stretched across the gravelled sweep from the windows and the door, and seemed to welcome them.

As they stepped within, they saw Biddy, a radiant vision, in a daring red frock, which became her dark colouring well, standing by the fireplace in the hall.

"Hulloa, Biddy Malone!" said her father, brightening at once. "In war paint already? Where is the

campaign to-night?"

"No campaign, worse luck," she said as she ran to give him a kiss. "Only a dull whist party at the Inglises. Have you forgotten it, Walter? I'm afraid Gibbie has."

"Hardly likely," said Walter, with a smile. "I had

forgotten it. Puss, when do we go?"

"Half-past eight. I ordered dinner for a quarter-

past seven, so you can't dress, dad."

"I'm not going to. I have to take Grahame Begg's meeting at the Music Hall at 8.15, so we can drive together."

"Oh, I rather wish I had been going," said Biddy

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musingly. "I think I should have enjoyed it. A good

speaker, isn't he?"

"Very; but he hasn't the ghost of a chance in West Edinburgh. It's a mere waste of powder and shot. You'll need to hurry up, Walter, if you want to dress before dinner."

Walter nodded, and took himself off upstairs rather disappointedly. He had looked forward to a long quiet evening in his own den among his books, but he did not dream of asserting himself. A stronger man would have claimed the right to spend his leisure as he liked, and considered his family less. Everyone expected Walter to be amiable and accommodating, and he seldom disappointed them. Yet he was not a social success either, and he had small compensation for the constant personal sacrifices he made for his family.

"I'll wash my hands presently," said Horne as he sank into an easy chair on the hearth. "We've just had a curious experience on the road. We found a poor drunken creature near the lodge gates, and took her in to Mrs. Glass, but her tender mercies are not conspicuous. We must get her home presently when she comes to, and can give an account of herself."

Biddy looked gravely interested.

"It isn't a nice night to be wandering about the roads. You never heard such a noise as the wind was making round the east gable while I was dressing."

"It's a wild night. Poor thing, she looks to belong to respectable people. There's an anxious house somewhere, depend upon it. I hope we'll be able to get

her back to-night."

At the moment Duncan, the butler, who had been fifteen years at Burton Lea, and was the picture of what an old family servant should be, came through the red swing door which shut off the servants' quarters.

"Please, sir, that's Glass in the kitchen, asking me to tell you the woman has come to, and told them who

she is. Her name is Gerard."

Biddy looked aghast at this message.

"Gerard! Gerard! Oh, surely it could never be Elsie Gerard's mother, papa?"

"I sincerely hope not, my dear."

"Nelson Street," murmured Duncan in his monotonous, well-trained voice. "Number seventeen, and she wants to start out walking back. Glass is asking whether they'll let her."

"Certainly not. Tell him to keep her till I come down, which will be in three-quarters of an hour. I'll

drive her in."

The man withdrew, and Biddy clasped her hands

together in dismay.

"It is Elsie's mother; they live in Nelson Street.

Oh, what a terrible thing."

"It is, indeed. Tell me something more about the family. Are they well off? What is the father?"

"I don't know; you see I've not known her long." was Mrs. Prentice that brought her to the mission. She told me at the time that it would be good for the girlwould take her out of herself. I gathered that she had some trouble at home, but I never dared to ask her. I am so sorry for her."

"It's a bad business," assented Horne gravely. "You must show her as much kindness as you can. Couldn't

you ask her out for a day or a few days?"

"I have done so, and she promised to come on Saturday, if possible. I understand now. Perhaps she mentioned Saturday because her father would be home from business then to look after her mother."

"Very likely. Is she the only child?"

"She has a brother in a lawyer's office somewhere. Bob Inglis says he knows him."

"I see. Poor things, that's about the worst kind of

family trouble one can have, I think."

Seeing the dinner being taken in, he rose and went

off to wash his hands.

The meal was rather hurried, and Walter did not come down till it was half through.

"You can have the landau; you'll need it coming back if Gilbert turns up at Moray Place," said Mr. Horne. "And I want to keep James to bring me back immediately after the meeting. Besides, it would not be suitable for us all to drive in with Mrs. Gerard."

"You have discovered her name then?" said Walter

with a mild interest.

"Yes. I am afraid, in fact we're certain, that she is Elsie Gerard's mother," said Biddy, with eyes full of pity. "I'm so thankful it was you who found her. Just think of the humiliation if she had been taken charge of by the police."

"I expect it isn't the first time, my dear," said Horne quietly. "By the look of her she must have

been imbibing a good while."

"They're not well off, papa. I am sure of that, for Elsie is very plainly dressed, and she often says she wishes she had some money for the mission. But I always think she looks sweet. Did you notice her at all?"

Horne could not say he had, whereat Biddy was disappointed. She had a sort of enthusiastic admiration for Elsie Gerard, who was so quiet and so different from her. It was a mutual admiration, and Elsie had certainly found life brighter since the doctor's wife had introduced her to the Sinclair Street Mission. Mrs. Prentice herself had little time to spare for it, having a nursery full of very small children, but her heart overflowed with compassion for the neglected little ones of Stockbridge, and she had been the first inspirer of the good work among them.

"The brougham is at the door, sir, and Glass is here again," said Duncan decorously. "It's all they can do

to keep her."

"Bless me, hasn't Glass got a pair of strong arms, or a key to his door?" asked Horne testily. "I've no patience with a fool."

Horne was given to plain and ofttimes brusque speech,

but Duncan never moved a muscle.

"I'll tell Glass, sir."

"No, you won't. I'll tell him myself, thank you. Go and get my coat and my muffler and a bundle of papers on the left hand corner of the desk in the library. They're docketed, so don't bring the wrong stuff. Will you young folks be late?"

"About twelve likely. Shall you be gone to bed,

papa?"

"I may; but if you like you can come up, and I'll tell you what I found at Nelson Street. I rather think that's what you're after."

"Perhaps I ought to go too, papa. I could put a long

dark cloak over my frock."

"No; I think the truest kindness you can show is to appear to know nothing about it, unless your friend

should speak of her trouble to you herself."

Biddy went out to the door with him, and kissed him as he stepped into the brougham. There was no misunderstanding between these two. Misunderstanding, indeed, was difficult where Biddy was concerned. She was so cheerfully outspoken, there never could be any doubt of her meaning or intention. And she had nothing to hide.

The fresh horse took the light single coupé swiftly down between the trees, and drew up sharp at the lodge door. Glass, who had run all the road back, arrived panting at the same time, and his wife opened the door

in evident relief.

"Is Mrs. Gerard ready to come?" asked her master

as he stepped across the threshold.

"Yes, I'm ready," came an excited voice from within. "But I don't want to be driven home like a prisoner. I'll go back the way I've come, without interference from anybody."

Horne stepped into the kitchen and surveyed her calmly for a moment. She quailed a little before the steadfastness of his gaze, and, remembering how the woman of the cottage had warned her that the master was a Justice of the Peace, she began to look timid and ashamed.

"Nothing is going to happen to you, my good lady," he said good humouredly. "And you ought to be very thankful that you have the chance of being taken home comfortably. It's snowing hard, with wind enough to cut you in two. Get her a shawl, Mrs. Glass. I'll bring it back with me."

Mrs. Glass, the picture of sour displeasure, having had such a bad half-hour with a half-drunk, half-angry woman, went to the other room and returned with an

old plaid.

"If she thocht she was gaun to get my best Paisley she was mista'en," she said afterwards to the meek William, but to her master she did not dare to make any demur. Horne had taken careful stock of their strange guest, and had arrived at two conclusions regarding her.

Mrs. Gerard declined the shawl so grudgingly offered, and as she appeared inclined to argue the point, Mr. Horne cut the scene short by desiring her to follow him

out to the carriage.

A few minutes more, and they were safely inside, the

door was shut, and they were driven sharply off.

Mrs. Gerard crouched in the corner, not offering to say a word. Mr. Horne wrapped the rug about her, and she did not even vouchsafe him a word of thanks. A small electric lamp in front of the brougham lighted the interior, so that he could see her quite well. She had that tumbled, untidy appearance natural enough in the circumstances, and, though the snow was drifting in upon them, he was obliged to keep one of the windows down to clear the air of the odour of stale spirits.

"Perhaps you will tell me how you happened to wander out this way?" he said kindly, thinking he might learn a little more of the family and circumstances

before he reached their destination.

"They were after me," she said, in a low, fearful

voice. "Blue and green and red, but the red ones are the worst. And Elsie went out, and left me to fight them myself. It was all Elsie's fault."

"They've all gone now though," he said soothingly.

"Are you sure? I thought I saw one hiding behind that woman in the cottage. If they torment me much more I'll jump out of the window some day. I've told them that."

The compassion deepened in his eyes as he listened to her wanderings. Well he knew what was the matter, and the thought of the home cursed by such an evil saddened him inexpressibly.

"You'll be all right. They're all demolished, blue, green, and red," he said soothingly. "And we'll soon be home. Think of their anxiety. They will be nearly

frantic."

"Elsie will cry, I suppose, and Humphrey will turn his head away, and their father will storm enough for both. Oh, you should hear him! Between him and the blue and green ones, I've a time. And nobody knows what I suffer."

Maudlin tears interrupted her deliverance, and she sank sobbing in the corner. Horne held his peace, and mentally calculated the time it would take them to cover the intervening distance. Had he known she was so bad he would have sent for her people, he decided, and allowed them to take her home themselves.

"You'll help me with him, won't you, if he's angry? He never understands, nobody does, and they'll never know what I suffer. It's been hard for me from the beginning," she whimpered when he did not answer. "The regimental life isn't very nice for a woman. The pride of them is awful in these garrison towns. I've never had a chance. Cosmo never seemed to understand that, and he was always at me. I've never had a chance."

"Your husband is a soldier, then?"

"Yes, he's retired now, but we're no better off; in

fact, worse, because it's half-pay. There's never been enough money. That's been the trouble all along. Elsie must marry rich. I'm always dinning it into her ears, but she's just like her father—thinks blood's everything. Asfor the lad, nobody knows what he thinks, or ever wil. There they are again! See the little red one

peeping out under the seat in that corner."

Horne took the electric lamp from its hanging bracket, and flashed it on the floor to show her there was nothing. Reassured, she sank back in her corner, and closed her eyes. To his immense relief her heavy breathing soon indicated that she had fallen asleep. They had now come to the long line of the city lamps, and as they rapidly drove, Horne pondered on the tragedy thus revealed. He could piece it together bit by bit, and the prospect of having further light shed upon it when they reached their journey's end interested him not a little.

CHAPTER XII

THE SHADOW ON THE HEARTH

CAPTAIN GERARD had gone to spend the afternoon with an old comrade-at-arms, lately retired from the Indian army, who had come to spend the declining years of his life in the city of his birth.

He had chosen a house at Trinity, a large family house standing on a hill facing the sea, much exposed to the winds that blew, yet commanding a view suffi-

cient to atone for many other drawbacks.

The occasion had naturally been reminiscent, and Captain Gerard, as he walked home leaning a little heavily on his stout stick, felt himself living in the past rather than in the present or any future he might have. Once a fiery, impetuous character, prone to good and generous deeds on the impulse of the moment, he had now sobered down. The discipline of life, the disappointment of many hopes, had all helped to change his outlook. Among the mistakes of his life his marriage may be numbered.

It had been the result of a hot-headed, chivalrous instinct to help a pretty girl out of a difficult situation, and the result had been thirty years of misery, if not for her, then absolutely for him. For she had a common mind and a weak will; she had never risen to nor appreciated what was required of her in her husband's position. She had gone to India with him, but even the cosmopolitan elements of society there had been

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shy of receiving her. Left much alone, conscious of her husband's alienation from her, though he was always kind, she seemed to sink, and acquired the unfortunate habit which had made the final misery. At last, in response to her own earnest entreaty, and also on account of their children's health, he sent her home, and she had lived five years at Bedford, where the children went to school.

That separation seemed to widen the gulf between them, and when Gerard finally retired from the army and faced the prospect the remainder of his life offered, he was dismayed. But he faced it manfully. He took her right away from the associations she had made in Bedford, which were bad, and had now been five years in Edinburgh, years of misery, with occasional gleams of happiness afforded by the companionship of his children.

They had to keep a continual watch over her, avoided society, lived entirely to themselves, all of which conditions of existence were particularly galling to a man of Gerard's temperament and pride, but on the whole he had taken it well. His visit to his old friend, however, a glimpse of the perfect happiness of his home, had saddened him inexpressibly. He realised that there could not be any real intimacy between the homes, and that he must pay his visits there alone. It was for his children he rebelled, especially for his girl. Of late she had seemed to droop in spirit, and to begin to look old. Old at twenty-four, when she ought to have been enjoying life and youth to the full. Such were the grey thoughts pursuing Cosmo Gerard as he walked somewhat slowly up the step ascent to his home. He felt himself failing physically. He had lived hard, and never shirked an arduous piece of work; nay, he had sought even the most dangerous as men are apt to do whose personal stake in life is light. But somehow he had missed the mark right through; he had seen other men, less capable and certainly less

deserving, pushed to the front, made much of, ap-

plauded by the outside world.

These things, part of "the great injustice," as he sometimes called life, had embittered a temperament naturally sunny. He was often irritable, and the little house in Nelson Street could not in any sense of the word be termed a happy home. He had no special apprehension of evil that evening as he approached his own door. He had had many a shock since they came to Edinburgh, but Elsie was very careful; she had indeed given her bright girlhood in devotion to her mother, from whom she received neither appreciation nor thanks. One of the saddest aspects of this special curse is the way in which it warps and destroys the natural feelings, turning the kindest people into cruel ones, not actively cruel perhaps, but passively so in that they neglect everything which makes the happiness of a home.

At the bottom of the street there was, right on the corner, a large imposing public-house, with a glaring front and fine mahogany swing doors, all calculated to attract the public, and incidentally to proclaim the

profits accruing from the sale of drink.

Gerard loathed this place; he had several times used such influence as he had in petitioning the magistrates to close it, but had so far been unsuccessful. The only reason he did not remove from that immediate temptation was that, their means being limited, it was not easy to find any neighbourhood free from places of a similar kind.

Therefore he remained, and railed at the existing

order of things.

As he passed by the tavern on the other side, he suddenly observed the swing doors fly open and a small servant-maid come out quickly, putting her cap straight as the wind caught it at the corner.

He recognised her in a moment as the only domestic they possessed, a creature so incompetent and altogether impossible, that whenever he saw her he felt his ire rising. But again means intervened, and Elsie, in whose hands the housekeeping and most of the work depended, had to put up with such material as she could afford to pay for. The difference between her and her father was that she looked on the bright side of things, and found all sorts of possibilities in the harum-scarum Kate Binnie. It resolved itself after all in the difference between youth and age.

The Captain gripped the stick more firmly, and took a step to the kerb as she came flying across in a slanting

direction still holding on her cap.

One of two things had happened—either she had betrayed the trust placed in her and disobeyed the most strict orders by going for drink for her mistress, or she was seeking her there.

Use and wont made no difference to the impatience

with which he waited to hear what had happened.

Kate's face blanched a little at the sight of her master, whom she greatly feared and did not understand. For though she had not actively assisted the calamity that had happened, she would certainly be held guilty by him. He never spoke to her except to find fault.

"What are you doing in that abominable place?"

he asked sternly.

"The mistress, sir; she's oot. She's run away. I've been at three pubs, and this is the second time I have

been there, but they've never seen her."

"How did she happen to get out? Whose carelessness was it?" he asked thickly, and the very acuteness of his suffering gave him a more terrible aspect in the eyes of Kate. She only saw his anger, however, and quailed under it.

But she was a brave girl, and she wanted to shield her dear Miss Elsie, who had been primarily to blame.

"It was my fault. Miss Elsie was oot, and the mistress was sleeping, and I was dressing mysel".

When I came from my room to get her tea, the door

was open, and she away. That's a'."

She turned away, having given her explanation, and walked on ahead to the door. She had to pause there, however, until her master advanced with his key, as there was no one at that moment in the house upstairs.

"Mr. Humphrey came in, and I think he's gone to

the police office. There's naebody up the stair.'

"And the door open, I suppose; the whole place to rack and ruin when I'm out," he said irascibly. "You clear anyhow, my good girl, to-morrow morning as

soon as it's light."

She did not appear greatly perturbed. She gave her cap a shove which set it at a ludicrous angle, and wiped her nose with the corner of her apron. She was still a very rough diamond in spite of Elsie's training, and the habits of the slums stuck to her. Fastidious to the last degree in personal matters himself, her master was in a state of perpetual revolt against her. She privately thought him a little mad, and greatly pitied her young mistress, who had to live in such near proximity to him. She was best pleased if a whole day could pass without seeing him at all.

Brought to bay, however, she had a kind of courage,

and on the stairs she made one remark.

"Naebody'll stop, sir. I'm willing because of Miss Elsie."

So saying, she disappeared indoors, and slammed the kitchen door.

The house door she had left open; her carelessness in small matters like that was unbelievable, and she had not yet apparently learned the use of doors. But her heart was faithful, and Elsie had reached it by some means which others did not comprehend.

Gerard stalked into the sitting-room, one of these shabby family rooms which tell a tale of fine tastes and inadequate means to gratify them, but nothing either reassured or depressed him there except a rug lying

half on the sofa and half on the floor, indicating the place where his wife had been resting before she left the house. He did not know what to do.

It was not the first time his wife had given them such a fright and humiliation, but familiarity with such experience did not make it any easier to bear. Usually they had been obliged to wait for the police to restore her, and she was quite well known to the force in the neighbourhood.

They all sympathised with the family cross, and the sight of the old Captain's proud figure stumping about the streets always roused their sympathy and interest. His very standoffishness appealed to them; they called

him "real gentry".

He looked old for his years at the moment as he threw his overcoat down and rubbed his hands together with a quick, nervous gesture which indicated the inward disturbance. His figure, though now inclining to stoutness, was still erect, and held in true military style, his good looks still remained, and his ample grey hair made a fine frame for his handsome face. From the sitting-room he walked to the bedrooms, and looked through them all. The kitchen door was shut; Kate suffered no interference with her domain. But, feeling that he must speak with some one, he pushed it open.

"Where did Miss Elsie go this afternoon, do you

know?"

"She went doon to Sinclair Street; a bairn was deein'; they sent for her. She was very feared to gang on account o' the mistress, but she was soond asleep, and I said I wad watch. If I hadna thocht she was deid soond, I wadna hae went to cheenge my frock. It was my fault, so ye needna be doon on her. She's near ooten her mind onywey."

It required some courage on Kate's part to make this deliverance; she had been trying to work herself up to it for some time, and the Captain's knock had only hastened the conclusion. The Captain admired courage,

and though his anger did not abate his face softened a little as he withdrew.

"Mission, mission! Why can't they stop at home and attend to their own mission? That's what I

want to know."

A key grated in the passage door, and he stood still almost sick at heart. It was only Elsie alone, with a little fur cap far back on her bright hair, her thin house frock blown with the wind, and her face red with the snow that had beat upon it. At the sight of her father she gave a start of fresh apprehension, but, like Kate, gathered all her courage in both hands.

"It's no use saying anything, father," she said, laying her hand on his arm. "Come in here, and I'll tell you how it happened. I don't think any one

really is to blame."

He followed her, his eyes softening inexpressibly. He loved her in his rough way, and very often his curtness of manner hid a deep revolt because he could

not alter the conditions of life for her.

"Mother was asleep, sound asleep. She must have had some more to-day, though where she gets it, Heaven only knows. I sometimes think somebody must send it up to her from the area. I'm sure yesterday I had the whole house upside down, mattresses and chair covers and everything off, but I found nothing. Well, they came for me to see a child that was dying, a poor widow's girl I got to know at the mission. Father, I couldn't refuse to go; she was crying for me, and Kate promised to watch. Where is Kate?"

"In the kitchen; she's got her quietus."

"Then you had no business to speak crossly to her," cried Elsie, in a sudden burst of exasperation. "She'll leave, and if she does I shall never be able to go through with it with another. Father, can't you see that we're all doing our best, and that nothing matters? We've just got to bear it, and be thankful when there is no catastrophe."

"There'll be one one of those days," he said gloomily.
"Well, we can't help it; we do our best," repeated the girl. "I felt sorry for Humphrey; I sometimes think Humphrey feels it more than any of us, father. I shall never forget his face as he went out to-night."
"It's sickening," said the Captain, with a groan. "I

"It's sickening," said the Captain, with a groan. "I think I'll take a dose of something myself, and be done with it. It's more than flesh and blood can stand."

Elsie, in need of a little sympathy, distraught with

the strain of the last hour, burst into tears.

At the moment there came a loud peal at the bell.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FRIEND IN NEED

GERARD himself ran to the door. They lived on the second floor, and it took any visitor a few

moments to ascend the steep stairs.

Presently, however, through the peculiar gloom of a badly-lighted common stair he beheld the figure of a man wearing a crush hat and fur-lined overcoat above his evening dress.

"Mr. Gerard?" he said inquiringly, looking up into

the Captain's eager face.

"Yes, at least I am Captain Gerard."

"My name is Horne. My carriage is below. I have

brought your wife home."

It was not a pleasant business, and Horne approached it in the simplest possible way by directly stating the fact, which he supposed would afford instant relief.

"I am much obliged to you, sir," replied the Captain, and Horne could see what humiliation he suffered.

"But where have you brought her from?"

"I was walking home from business to my house on the Cramond Road. It was in the roadway we found her, about two miles out."

By this time Elsie, white-faced and anxious, and the troubled maid-servant in the background, appeared. At sight of Elsie, Horne took off his hat.

"Good evening, Miss Gerard. You remember me, I

hope—Biddy's father?"
"Oh, yes, but what——'

"He's brought your mother back," said the Captain brusquely. "Thank you, sir, we need not detain you.

Come down, Elsie, and let us get her up."

It was distinctly ungracious, but Horne absolved him from blame, and never afterwards bore him a grudge for it. He understood, partly at least, what this kind of experience must mean to a man of Gerard's temperament. His whole and peculiar pity, however, was reserved for Elsie.

"She is asleep. I did not awake her till I had come up," he said in the most natural manner in the world. "She is quite able to walk up. She seemed pretty well

as we drove in."

At the moment some one else appeared on the stair,

coming up slowly.

"Humphrey," cried Elsie, recognising her brother, "mother has come back; at least, this gentleman has

brought her."

"I saw the carriage at the door, but it was very dark, and I did not look inside," replied Humphrey as he mounted to the landing, where they all stood for an awkward second. Horne looked keenly at Humphrey Gerard, but no one seemed to think of introducing him. He liked what he saw, however, and concluded that the poor woman below must have given up long ago trying to live up to her family. He had seen the like tragedy before; in this case, however, he did not know which to pity most.

"I'll bring her up," said Humphrey quickly. "You

stop here, father; no, don't come down.'

"I will bid you good evening, Captain Gerard," said Horne, and followed Humphrey and Elsie downstairs. The Captain, as if overcome with shame, did not repeat his thanks, but simply walked into the house.

Horne never forgot the picture of Elsie, as he saw her in the street leaning forward into the carriage to

awaken her mother.

The wind blew her hair upon her white brow, and

her face with its mingled air of strength and sweetness continued to haunt him for the rest of the evening.

His tact guided him how to act, and the moment Mrs. Gerard was awakened and they induced her to step from the carriage, about which a few stragglers had already begun to gather, he got in himself, and with a brief good night drove away. Horne was much in request for meetings, at which he made an admirable chairman. He took a good deal of interest in public and political questions, and was looked upon as a safe man; in fact, he had been approached by his party to stand for one of the divisions of the city rendered vacant by death. He had declined, however, though the idea appealed to him, entirely because he felt he could not give up the time from his business.

He ought to have been able to do it, with two sons of such age, and unconsciously his disappointment, keener than he knew, had lately embittered somewhat

his attitude towards them.

He took the chair at the meeting in support of the candidature of an old friend, but when he heard him

speak he almost groaned.

This man had neither eloquence nor common sense, Horne decided, and again wished he had stood in his place. Those who knew him best, and there were a good many of his acquaintances on the platform, missed something in him that night, and said afterwards that he was either tired or ill. Yet when he rose to speak they forgot their first impression, and listened spell-bound. Even the candidate felt himself out of it.

"Horne's the man," they whispered one to another.
"He ought to be asked to reconsider his decision. By running Begg we simply play into the enemy's hands."

Horne left the meeting, not caring what impression he had made, and not stopping behind to discuss matters. His brougham was waiting, and he drove home directly, arriving shortly after ten o'clock.

He was very tired, and called for a cup of strong

coffee, which meant that he would sit up for awhile. He did not suppose that the others would be back before midnight, and he would wait for them. He was writing with great assiduity at his desk, when he heard the carriage wheels. He put his paper away, locked the drawers, and was standing before the fireplace when they came in—Biddy first, a radiant vision in her red gown, with a cloud of white about her head, and Walter behind.

"Where's Gilbert?" he asked sharply.

"He never turned up at all," answered Biddy. "And Mary was very cross; as for Mrs. Inglis, Gibbie will have a bad quarter of an hour when he goes to explain and make his apologies."

"Never turned up at all!" echoed Horne in amazement. "What did he say to you this afternoon, Biddy, when he came home? He was here, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, about half-past four. He only said that he was dining with a man at the Club, and as he had some business to do between he'd take his clothes, his evening clothes I mean, and dress there."

"It's a most extraordinary proceeding," said Horne.

"Can you throw any light on it, Walter?"

"No, sir. I don't get his confidence, unfortunately. But he has seemed out of sorts all the last week. It must have been a very particular friend to keep him from Moray Place. He knows quite well how punctilious Mrs. Inglis is about small matters."

Horne dropped the subject, though he did not dismiss

it from his mind.

"I got the lady home all right, Biddy, and restored her to the bosom of her family."

"Elsie's mother," cried Biddy breathlessly. "Did

you see the poor dear?"

"I saw them all. That girl has a stiff time of it there, Biddy. I only was in their company for about three minutes, but I could see that she wants all the kindness you can show her."

"I know, or at least I have suspected it; but you see, though I have asked her so often she never can come. Now, of course, I can understand. But she really promised to come on Saturday. What sort of a father is he?"

"Fiery, an old soldier. His pride made him ache all over to-night. I felt sorry for him. There's been a

tragedy yonder, the tragedy of a lifetime."

Biddy looked intensely interested, her eyes glowing

like stars in her head.

"Get to bed, Biddy Malone, or there'll be pale cheeks and dull eyes to-morrow. It's after midnight. I'll sit up an hour or so, and wait for Gilbert." "I can sit up.

"Don't, sir," said Walter earnestly.

You must be tired; indeed you look it."

"I've got something to do yet before I sleep. The meeting was a sort of fiasco, Walter, and I fear very much that Begg is the round man in the square hole. He'll never unite the party, and there was a feeling of general dissatisfaction.

"You are the man, dad!" cried Biddy eagerly. "And you ought to have been persuaded. I don't think I'll

ever forgive you, so there."

She danced up to him, gave him two or three kisses,

and said good night.

As the door closed upon her Horne smiled, though

his eyes were luminous with a deep affection.

"She's a rare creature, Walter. We ought to thank God for her. Where will the man be found good enough to mate with her?"

Walter shook his head.

"There are plenty of them fluttering round, but I

agree with you that her mate will be hard to find."

"We may safely leave it to her. Biddy will make no mistake. She's sound at the core. I don't like this about Gilbert. It's neither seemly nor comprehensible. I shall have to get some explanation from him. I must say I don't like his ways of late. So long as he's under my roof I've the right to know something about how he spends his time outside. And Miss Inglis can't like that sort of treatment. She was cross, Biddy said."

"She seemed puzzled and a little indignant. They had an uncle there from London, Mrs. Inglis's brother, Sir Anthony Blair. He was naturally anxious to meet Gilbert. Unfortunately for me he mistook me for him."

"I can't understand it. Gilbert must have known this, for he saw Miss Inglis here last night. Have you

any theory, Walter?"

"I have, sir. I believe that Gilbert has some other entanglement that he's trying to get rid of. The other Sunday, when I was walking over Corstorphine Hill, I saw him in the distance walking with a girl. They didn't see me, but they seemed pretty intimate."

"I see; that might explain a good deal. I hope it is a simple entanglement," said Horne grimly. "Did you

speak of it to him?"

"Oh, no; I am the last man, as you know, sir, to

poke my nose into other folks' business."

"But it is just possible that this might have been your business," said his father a trifle irritably. "At least, it concerns the family peace and honour. The Inglises would never stand that; an entanglement, I mean. The engagement is only tolerated now because they think there's a big money backing behind. This, in spite of what I said to Kilmartin, but I tell you frankly, Walter, I'm not going to keep Gilbert doing nothing, and, if he wants to marry and to set up an establishment the Inglises would think good enough, he's got to turn over a new leaf—not one new leaf, but a whole sheaf of them."

"I believe you are right, sir," said Walter, but there was a half-sigh in his voice. He felt as if he, too, were being weighed in the balance and found wanting.

"I'm not going to pay the piper all the time and stand the patronage of the Inglises at the same time.

Bob Inglis knows fine why I don't accept his wife's invitation to Moray Place. She shall come to me in the proper spirit before I go, I tell you frankly. I only suffer the thing because I like the girl, and thought she'd steady Gilbert."

Walter was silent a moment, standing with his arm

on the mantel-shelf looking down into the fire.

"May I say something to you, sir?"
"Why, certainly; say what you will."

"I have been thinking over this Parliamentary business, and they were talking about it at the Inglises to-night. It seems to be the universal opinion that you should reconsider your decision not to stand. Is that quite impossible, sir?"

"Quite; as matters now stand at the works, it is quite impossible. You know you have never got a grip

of the affair, and Gilbert can't be relied on."

Walter winced slightly. He was more sensitive than

his father knew.

"Would it not be possible to get some one in from the outside as responsible manager, so that you could have leisure? I think it would be better for me to leave the works."

"Leave the works? But what, in heaven's name, would you do? You are twenty-six—almost twenty-seven. A man can't take up a new profession at that age. He ought to have got beyond the pupil stage."

"Granted; but I still think it not too late for me to

enter the profession I like."

"You mean medicine?"

"Yes."

"You would face the drudgery of a five years' course even yet."

"Yes, sir, gladly; and, if you will be good enough to lend me the money, I will see that it is repaid—every

penny of it."

"It is not a question of money. Your mother left you two thousand pounds. There is nothing to hinder you taking that. It's the waste of time and the poor

return at the end of it. You know Prentice; he works like a galley slave, and his pittance last year was seven hundred and fifty pounds from every source. The market is overstocked—choked, in fact. I think it would be suicidal myself."

"Prentice has the work he loves, father; he is happy," said Walter quietly, and at the moment looked so like his mother that a sudden curious soft-

ness crept about Horne's heart.

"And you would clear out?"

"Yes; asking no favour, and leave the place clear for a better man. I wish I could have been of more use, sir, but my heart is not in it. It is neither fair to me nor to you."

"I had no idea you still had that in your mind, or that you felt it so keenly. I don't understand it my-

self, but we'll sleep on it."

For the moment the veil of reserve seemed to be lifted, and they stood heart to heart. The eager light in Walter's eye was a revelation to Horne just as his unusual tenderness was to his son.

"I am sorry we have disappointed you, father," he

said simply.

"Perhaps it is I who have made the mistake," said Horne, with a sigh. "There was a remark made tonight by Begg, about the only sensible words he did speak, and I would hardly have given him credit for them. He said that the successful man was the least capable of appreciating great economic questions, because he saw them only from his own point of view, always arrogant and prejudiced. I may have erred just here. I have missed your mother, lad, in the last year especially, more than I can say. Good-night. I'll think it over, and we'll talk about it to-morrow. At least, you have never given me any of the sort of anxiety I am suffering at present. I want to know where that boy spends so many of his evenings, apparently lengthening into nights."

Walter said nothing, and they parted for the night.

CHAPTER XIV

UNANSWERED

HORNE returned to his desk when Walter left him, and finished the piece of work he had begun. It was a political speech, the speech he would have de-

livered that night had he stood in Begg's place.

There did not seem to be much point in preparing what would probably never be heard, but it was a mental exercise particularly to his liking, and it interested him to take up one by one the points the candidate had neglected. When he had finished it was almost two o'clock.

He locked up his desk, and before leaving the room drew aside the curtains, and pulled up the blind to look out, thinking of Gilbert, who was still outside, no one

knowing where he was spending the night.

A man of strictly upright life himself, the train of thought suggested by his son's absence was not a pleasant one, but rather a haunting nightmare calculated to banish sleep from his eyes. The scene upon which he gazed was one of extraordinary, even weird, beauty, and he stood a moment or so lost in admiration of it. It seemed to lay a hush upon his spirit.

A heavy hoar frost sparkled on every bush and tree, and lay white upon the spacious lawns, intensified by the brilliant light from a moon riding high in a cloud-

less, star-gemmed sky.

The stillness was profound; he could hear the purl of the water where it ran at the bottom of the slope,

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purer and clearer, before it reached the lower reaches, where many works aided in its pollution.

He drew another sigh as he turned away, sleep still far from his eyes, but fully aware that a sleepless night

means an indifferent working day.

Biddy had replenished his dressing-room fire when she had looked in to see whether everything was right for him. A big easy-chair stood temptingly beside it; he sank into it, and took another cigarette.

An hour later he was still there, fast asleep, and he awoke no more until some stirring of the household

caused him to rise with a start.

Seven o'clock rang from the carriage clock on the

mantelpiece, and he put his hand on the bell.

It was answered by Duncan, who acted as valet as well as butler in the house. "Send somebody to make a fire here, Duncan, and get my bath ready. I fell asleep in my chair and only woke just now."

"Yes, sir, you must feel very cold."

"I'm stiff. They were late last night, and I had some work to do myself."

"A cup of tea, sir?" said Duncan, insinuatingly, though it was a luxury his master seldom indulged in.

"Well, yes; I'd be glad of it—and the brougham at eight. I shall have my breakfast at ten minutes to, in the little morning-room. Don't disturb the others. This is mail day, and I want to get down sharp."

"Yes, sir," said Duncan, turning to go.

"And Duncan, do you happen to know whether Mr. Gilbert slept at home last night?"

"No, sir, he didn't. I've just heard Hannah say his

room door was open, and nobody had been in it."

"All right, you may go; say nothing about it downstairs, Duncan. Doubtless he slept at the Club, he was dining a gentleman there."

Duncan, the picture of discretion, moved away to

fulfil his master's behests.

By eight o'clock Horne, well wrapped up, and fortified

with a cold bath and a warm breakfast, feeling better than he expected, or deserved, he might have said

grimly, drove away from the house.

It was nothing uncommon for him to make such an early start. Often in the summer mornings he would walk by the field paths, and be at the works when the men were going in at half-past six. In this, however, neither of his sons had ever emulated him. They were content with a working day beginning at nine o'clock. It might be that there was no need for this close application on Horne's part, it showed the eager bent of his mind and the power of early association. "An hour in the morning is worth two at any other part of the day,"

was one of his favourite sayings.

Horne was slightly worried anticipating the contents of the foreign and colonial mails. The returns for the last month in every department of the business showed a considerable falling off. He was determined if the fresh orders were unsatisfactory to make a thorough investigation into the working of every department, and try to bring it up to the highest state of efficiency. The feeling that his own seemed to be the only stake in the concern, that he would have to reorganise singlehandedly, tinged even his morning thoughts with bitterness. And when he thought about Gilbert his mouth set in a long hard line.

Walter arrived at a quarter past nine, and found his father at his desk surrounded by a great mass of corres-

pondence.

"Good morning, sir; surely you were very early this morning?"

"I was here by half-past eight; had a bad night and

thought I'd work it off."

His voice though grave was quite pleasant. He had no special grudge against Walter at the moment, their talk of last night having partially cleared the air. That he was blind to the remunerative life-work lying to his hand was perhaps rather his misfortune than his fault. And Walter was always straight—his word as good as his bond. It was a great deal to be thankful for.

"If you had called me, father, I would have come in

with you-you know that."

"Oh yes, but honestly, I did not think of it. I was worried about Gilbert. He did not come in at all last night. I must get at the bottom of this. He's not a drinker, nor, so far as I am aware, a gambler, so there must be a woman in it."

Walter looked very serious.

"It is incredible. If he were not engaged to Miss Inglis, or even if it were to any one but her, I can't take it in, and I sincerely hope for all our sakes that

there is nothing of that kind."

"If he has an entanglement, or has had, as you seemed to think last night, he may have some difficulty in breaking it off. If only the fool would give me or you his confidence. It is certain the Inglises would never forgive him if they knew—why should they? After all, they are entitled to a clean record for their daughter. When we think of Biddy we know where we are."

"Don't be certain," pleaded Walter; "let us wait; possibly some satisfactory explanation may be forthcoming—indeed I am certain of it. Gilbert is not a

scoundrel, father. He is your own son."

Horne appreciated the kindly tone of Walter's re-

marks, and his features relaxed.

"They're better this week," he said, indicating the letters with a nod. "Things are looking up again, but I'm going to go thoroughly into every department. The laboratory is the least satisfactory, so I'll tackle that first. I've answered Le Marchand's letter, at least noted down what's to be said. You'll put it into French. There's a communication from a new customer in Prussia, but we can't look at his terms. Put on seven or eight per cent. I'll be back shortly, but I'll have a short day. The 'Tharsis' meets to-day at Dowell's; it'll be a big turn-out of shareholders, all grumbling."

He left the counting-house, and, crossing the green, entered the laboratory, a handsome building which had been erected and equipped at great cost, and had been

one of the pet parts of the concern.

But so far, by reason of some looseness in the working, it had never recouped a tithe of its cost. Horne himself had no technical training in chemistry, and his ideas, though original and often successful, had to depend for their carrying out on others. Gilbert had been expensively trained, both at home and foreign laboratories, but so far, like the building, had never recouped half the cost of his education. As matters looked now, there did not appear to be much hope of improvement in that direction. Horne found the men all at work, however, and he had nothing to complain of.

When he had made his tour, and was about to leave the building by the end door which opened on a broad pathway between it and the main works, he encountered Gilbert, arriving for the first time. He took out his watch. "Seven minutes to ten; what hours are

these?" he asked sternly. "Come in here."

Gilbert followed like the culprit he was. It had been his one hope that this might happen to be one of his father's late mornings, and that he might be busy at work before he came in.

There was a small dressing-room close by the outer door. They both walked into it, and Gilbert hung up

his overcoat.

"I'm waiting for some explanation," said his father sternly.

Gilbert assumed a look of surprise.

"Why, I left a message with Biddy yesterday afternoon," he said. "I was dining a fellow at the Club—a chap from Vienna, whose people showed me a lot of kindness when I was there."

"You should have dined him at home; that was the proper thing," his father said curtly. "But that does

not explain the rest. You did not turn up at Morav Place, and where have you been all night?"

Gilbert was silent a moment, as he got into his work-

"We played late," he mumbled at last. "They're beggars to play, these Austrians, and I went back with him to his hotel."

"Even if you are telling me the truth, which I am afraid I must doubt, it is not a satisfactory account of yourself. You were due elsewhere, and the Inglises are not the kind of people to stand nonsense of that

kind. You are only on sufferance there as it is."

Gilbert winced, but his shifty eyes did not meet his

father's gaze.

"I couldn't help myself-yes, I will own up. I had too much champagne, and it was better not to go on to Moray Place. I've written to Mary, and—and I hope you won't give me away, sir. It won't happen again."
"It's a very thin story, lad. What hotel was it?"

"The Royal."

"Well, all I've got to say is, that I'm thoroughly dissatisfied, and unless you mend your ways, you'll have to seek another berth. The work here is not half done. In fact, the thing is scandalous. And, until you have proved to my satisfaction that your story of last night is true, I'm afraid there's likely to be a dryness between you and me."

So saying, he turned on his heel and left Gilbert

standing alone.

Horne continued his tour of inspection, and got back

to the counting-house about noon.

Usually father and sons lunched together at the works, where a small but comfortable dining-room was under the care of the night watchman's wife.

"I think I'll lunch in town to-day, Walter; the 'Tharsis' meeting is at two. Gilbert's back; a curious story he has of dining an Austrian friend at the Club, and getting too much champagne. It won't wash, lad;

for let him be what he likes, Gilbert's not a drinker. I'm no nearer getting to the bottom of things than before."

He drove away in the brougham about ten minutes later, and at one Walter and his brother met at

luncheon.

"What's the matter with the governor?" asked Gilbert. "He's on the warpath with a vengeance. Gave it to me neat, he did."

"He has the right to grumble, I think. We don't do much credit to the business," said Walter, signifi-

cantly. "What became of you last night?"

"I'm coming to that; though why I should be put through my facings like a maid who has exceeded her time limit, I don't know," said Gilbert, dryly. "I dined a chap at the Club last night, and we had billiards after. No, I didn't forget about the hanged party at Moray Place, but I don't like their shows there, and Mary knows I don't. But I've apologised, and if she doesn't like to accept it, she can do the other thing. Oh, she will be right enough; it's the rest of them. Heaven and earth, what do they think they are?"

Walter faintly smiled.

"They were angry, Mrs. Inglis specially so, and it was very awkward for us being obliged to say we

couldn't explain it."

"Well, I honestly meant to turn up; but it was impossible, I tell you; so where's the good?" said Gilbert, irritably. "But, hang it all, that's a trifle to have upset the governor's equilibrium, especially as he isn't particularly gone on the Inglis lot."

Walter picked his cutlet bone in silence. He was not particularly anxious to discuss the situation with his brother. Certainly he would not join in passing strictures on their father. He was too conscious of

his own shortcomings.

"I guess we've disappointed him; in fact, I know

we have," he remarked at length. "Where were you last night, Gibbie? You're wasting; it's that that bothers him."

"A chap must see a bit of life," answered Gilbert, with his eyes on his plate. "I told him where I was last night, and if he wouldn't accept my explanation, what am I to do? A fellow's stumped, of course, when his word's not taken."

At the very moment, Horne, with a peculiar set look on his face, was entering the vestibule of the Royal Hotel.

The manager, to whom he was well known, came for-

ward instantly, to bid him a courteous good day.

Horne did not like his errand, but he meant to get at the bottom of Gilbert's behaviour, and his own personal pride must be made subordinate to his purpose.

"Good morning. Business good, I hope? I merely

looked in to ask you a question."

"Hope I'll be able to answer it to your satisfaction,

"Did one of my sons, the younger one, sleep here last night, returning rather late with an Austrian friend who has quarters here?"

The manager shook his head.

"If you will kindly wait a moment, Mr. Horne, I'll

inquire.'

He stepped back to the desk, and made inquiries, which were promptly answered by the clerk. He came back shaking his head.

"Mr. Gilbert Horne was not here last night, sir; and

there is no Austrian gentleman in the hotel."

"I thought as much," said Horne, with a nod. "It is not of much consequence, a family matter, that is all; pray don't mention it."

"I should not dream of it, sir," the manager assured him, as he courteously accompanied him to the door.

CHAPTER XV

THE KINDLY THOUGHT

HORNE attended the Board meeting of the Company in which he was interested, at the offices in George Street, and when he left it about four o'clock, stood for a moment undecided, not caring to return to

Bonnygate, and still less inclined to go home.

For the moment things were out of joint in Gilbert Horne's mind and life, and never had the sense of personal loneliness oppressed him as it did then. "Perhaps I made a mistake. If I had married again ten years ago it might have been better for us all," was his

inward thought.

He was at a loss to know why such a thought should have suggested itself at that particular moment, but he could not rid himself of it. He had always held strong views on the subject of second marriages, to which he attributed the wreck of many families of his acquaintance. And he had never scrupled to express the opinion that it was often a man's duty to endure the loneliness of widowed life for the sake of his children.

But though his wife had been dead fifteen years, he had never met anyone he desired to put in her place. He thought of her with a sudden passionate longing as he turned his face westwards, intending to walk home by easy stages. She had been a wise woman, and full of sympathy; the brief period of their married life had been unusually happy. She had been an invalid for five months before her death, and in that time they had

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had many long talks. She had let him understand that so far as she was concerned if he chose to marry again he must let no thought of her deter him. Grateful for the happiness he had given, for the love he had showered upon her, she would not leave him selfishly bound. Only for Biddy, then a passionate, highly strung, and undisciplined little girl, she had feared. But after his wife's death Horne had been fortunate in securing for Biddy a governess companion, who was all that a woman must be to fill that difficult situation with satisfaction to herself and the rest of the household. Miss Laurence had remained an inmate of Burton Lea until Biddy returned from Germany. She left then, and was now living in a picturesque cottage just below the Dean Bridge.

She was still a devoted friend of the family, interested in all its doings. Horne thought of her as he turned away from the meeting, and decided to pay her a visit on the way home, and ease his mind of his anxieties concern-

ing Gilbert

But he was prevented making that visit that day by one of these unlooked-for happenings which are in reality

a part of the Great Plan.

At the corner of George Street and Charlotte Square, as he was about to turn down the steep slope, he saw Humphrey Gerard crossing the square in a slanting direction, carrying a bundle of papers under his arm.

He recognised him at once, and admired his looks. He stood still, thinking it only civil to ask how his

mother was after the previous night's experience.

Gerard recognised the proprietor of the Bonnygate Works, and when he saw him waiting he came forward raising his hat.

Horne, after a brief hesitation, held out his hand. "I thought you were Mr. Gerard. Right, am I?"

"Humphrey Gerard, at your service."
"How is your mother this morning?"

"Not very well. They've had the doctor," he replied

in a low voice. She's got a temperature—no wonder, after last night."

"It was a cold night. And your father and sister, I

hope they are well?

"Yes, thank you."

There was a brief awkwardness which neither seemed able to dispel.

But Horne liked the look of the young man, and felt

an unusual desire to learn something more of him.

"I should like to know you better," he said frankly. "When can we meet again?"

Gerard shook his head.

"Unless you can come to our house, sir, there is no other opportunity."

"What business are you in?"

"I'm a clerk at Payne, Howard & Payne's." Horne looked the surprise he certainly felt.

"A clerk in a lawyer's office; a pretty poor business, Mr. Gerard, for your father's son."

"I am too well aware of it, sir, but I hope it won't

last for ever."

"There's about as much prospect in it as in that blank wall. I've seen men crushed on that wheel before. Why don't you strike out a line for yourself? You look as if you had stuffing enough to do it."

"I'm thinking of emigrating."

Horne struck the point of his umbrella on the pave-

ment with a pretty suggestive force.

"Emigrate! What do you want to emigrate for? We haven't got too much brains in this country; we don't want to send all the best away. And if you're going to get on at all you'll get on here, if you apply the same energy. That's what I tell them all, but it's the application that's lacking. Don't do anything in a hurry. Come and see me one day. Come out next Saturday afternoon with your sister. My daughter tells me she has promised to come. I suppose you get off at two?"

"Yes, sir; two o'clock."

"All right, I'll expect you. Would I be likely to see your father, do you think, if I were to go down to Nelson Street now?"

"Almost certain, I should say."

"Then I'll go. Good day, Mr. Gerard. Give up the emigration craze; it's only for the hewers of the wood and the drawers of water. You're fit for something

higher."

The words, spoken in all good faith, had a certain uplifting effect on Humphrey Gerard's mind. He was not personally anxious to leave Scotland, only the consciousness that he was wasting the best years of his life had caused him to entertain it seriously. It is easy to talk of making opportunity, but when a man gets into a groove in a city like Edinburgh it requires something little short of an earthquake to get him out of it. He is so bound, hand and foot with the conventions, the outlook is so narrow, that unless he has the courage to break away, he may live in the same narrow world all his life and die in it, unknown and unrecorded.

Only recently, however, had Humphrey Gerard awakened to realisation of the prospect which awaited

him.

Horne, whose thoughts were now turned into a fresh groove, continued his walk down the steep descent, and, turning off at Queen Street, walked, on the garden side of that exclusive thoroughfare, towards Nelson Street.

As he walked, glancing occasionally across at the tall, decorous houses, he thought of all the men and women he had known who had lived their lives there, lives set in the lines of strict social convention, and he smiled a little. An old Edinburgh man himself, he had the pedigree and history of most of them at his finger-ends. And he knew the hollow sham which many of them had to perpetrate in order to uphold the traditions of what was called the best Edinburgh society.

He knew the poverty of the land hidden behind the

immaculate doors, the tragedy of pride and silent endurance which made the struggle for existence a more real and awful thing than the mere problems of the slums. For, in that fatal atmosphere, the souls as well as the hearts of men and women were stifled and slain.

Horne loved Edinburgh. His hobby in his few leisure moments was the study of her antiquities, her noble

history, her rich romance.

But he despised the Edinburgh of his own day; its hollow pride, its exclusiveness, its sickly assumption of intellectual and hereditary superiority, for which reasons he had held himself aloof from its society.

And it is the looker-on who sees all the intricacies of

the game.

The Service element in that society he knew well also. Many of the military and retired naval folk live out Granton and Trinity way, and he had been surprised to find the Gerards in Nelson Street, living apparently simply in accordance with straitened means, aping at nothing. He had a mind to know more of them.

In this contemplative and perhaps slightly introspective mood he arrived at the house in Nelson Street, and rang the bell he had touched for the first time the pre-

vious night.

The little maid-servant admitted him, and showed him at once into the sitting-room, where the Captain was buried deep in a book, smoking a long churchwarden pipe, and looking the picture of homely comfort.

He sprang up when his visitor was announced, and

made a hasty apology.

"We've only one sitting-room," he explained, "and

it's not always fit for visitors."

"It is I who ought to apologise for this intrusion, Captain Gerard," said Horne easily. "I happened to have an hour to spare this afternoon after a Company meeting, and I felt disinclined to go back to business. I met your son in George Street, and he told me Mrs. Gerard was not well to-day."

"She's got a touch of pneumonia. Not surprising after last night," replied the Captain frankly. "I don't regard your call as an intrusion, I assure you, Mr. Horne, but the reverse. I am glad of the opportunity of thanking you again for the incomparable service you rendered my poor wife last night. I am afraid you thought us an ungrateful crew, but perhaps you understood?"

"It was nothing at all, my dear sir; an act of common humanity. May I sit down, and join your smoke? Things are out of joint with me to-day. I suppose most of us have such days; they are part and

lot of the thing we call life."

Horne had an easy and winning way with him, and as he took the chair the Captain made haste to offer, the sun fell athwart his face, and showed all its features strongly. It was a remarkably fine face, and singularly youthful looking. For though Horne had lived the strenuous life of close application to business, it had been a clean, strong, wholesome life, often uplifted by high thoughts.

Gerard, himself a lonely man in a big city, with few friends of his own standing or kind, felt his heart warm

to him in a manner which surprised himself.

"Things have been out of joint with me for a good long time," he said soberly. "But I have always thought of you as a prosperous man."

"I am a rich man if that is prosperity," said Horne frankly. "But as one begins to go down the hill, he weighs up life. In my case I have found it wanting."

"Yet you have a family. My little girl has spoken of your charming daughter, whom she meets at the

mission school."

"Yes, she is certainly all a man could desire; but look you, Captain Gerard, nothing compensates a man for disappointment in his sons. Have you lived long in Edinburgh, may I ask?"

"Only five years. The most of my life has been

spent in India, where my children were born. But they couldn't stop there. I sent them home with their mother for their education, and because her health was bad too. When I came back I found this."

He gave his hand a comprehensive wave, which Horne

fully understood.

"Had you no idea before she left India?"

"A little, but I thought that England would cure her. I had the misfortune to make a mistake in my marriage, but I have never complained. Where is the good? I did it with my eyes open, and I have tried to do my duty by her. It is only of late the burden has become intolerable. A man can bear for himself what he resents with his whole soul for his children. What life has my girl had or my son either? He is a fine fellow, but I fear he has been wasted."

"I had a word with him this afternoon," said Horne. "I like his looks. There's brains behind that quiet

manner-brains that have never had a chance."

"Precisely what I'm trying to explain." "It's monstrous that he should be where he is. Talking of emigrating he was this afternoon. British Columbia-very good, but we don't want to send our best there. I've come with a proposal which you can lay before him when he comes in. I can make a place for him at my works. No experience? What does it matter? He'll gain it, and that's where brains come

The Captain looked the surprise he felt, but did not speak for a moment. Horne understood his

silence.

"Perhaps you despise business? We're so hedged about with different sorts of pride in Edinburgh that one has to walk warily," he said with a suggestion of good-humoured scorn in his voice.

The Captain hastily put up a deprecating hand.

"Pride! What have I to do with pride? I despise nothing. I shall be more than grateful if you will give the boy a chance. Believe me, he has never had one, and he is the most dutiful of sons."

The door opened suddenly, and Elsie came in. She flushed a little at the sight of the stranger, whose entrance she had not heard. Also the memory of the last night with all its poignant humiliation was sore upon her.

"Mr. Horne, my dear," said her father, and she gathered from his expression that they had arrived at some good understanding. "Perhaps you will get us a cup of tea now."

"Oh, yes," she said, as she shook hands. "Mother has fallen asleep. I was just coming, not knowing any one was here, to ask whether we should have tea

now."

The sweetness of her look struck Horne afresh. Her face had traces of the anxious hours she had spent, but the brave, steadfast spirit shone in her bright eyes.

"My daughter is looking forward to seeing you at Burton Lea on Saturday," he said quickly. "I hope nothing will prevent you, and that you will bring your brother with you."

"Humphrey! Oh, I should like that! He does not go to many places. It will depend on how my mother is, thank you, Mr. Horne; but please tell Biddy I will

write to her to-morrow."

"You shall go. I will look after things," said the Captain quickly. "This little girl, Mr. Horne, is the real captain of this house, and we are all under her orders. She has an idea, I believe, that it would go to rack and ruin without her."

"And so perhaps it might," said Horne gallantly.

"I can easily believe it."

"There, we shall have you spoiled, Captain. Go and get us that cup of tea, and we'll discuss your merits till you come back," said her father banteringly.

She shook her finger at him as she left the room, and Horne gathered that there was at least a good understanding between these two, some sense of comradeship which must help them over the rough places of the daily journey.

"You are as fortunate in your daughter, Captain

Gerard, as I am in mine," said Horne.

"Fortunate is not the word. She's—she's a splendid creature—all a woman should be, sir; and equipped as she is she has to grovel here," he added, bringing his fist down on the table to emphasise his words. "I have to look on and say nothing, because I can't help myself. It's part of the great injustice men call life."

CHAPTER XVI

MISS HORNE "AT HOME"

MISS HORNE had decided to be at home to her friends on Saturday afternoons, and cards for her first reception had gone out. She looked forward to the summer Saturday afternoons, when the garden should be in its glory and the tennis lawn in perfect order. Meanwhile the ordinary prim calls must prevail. Her father had promised to help her to entertain, but she did not depend on either of her brothers.

When Saturday came Horne found himself looking forward to the afternoon when the Gerards had promised to come. They had heard no more about Mrs.

Gerard, and supposed that she was recovering.

Early in the afternoon a brougham brought Miss Inglis and her mother to Burton Lea. Biddy recognised the bottle-green livery as the carriage turned the bend in the avenue.

"Here are the Inglises, and Gibbie is not here, father. I wonder whether he has been there to apologise. I asked him, and he told me to mind my own business."

"Did he?"

Horne's face betrayed the keenest displeasure. Matters had been very strained at the works since the middle of the week, and the misunderstanding between Gilbert and his father had not been cleared away.

It was early, and Biddy surmised that the Inglises had come on a voyage of discovery. They were announced presently, and she went forward to receive

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them at the end of the long drawing-room. Mrs. Inglis walked with a stately step, her garments rustling as she moved. She was a tall, spare woman, who prided herself on her carriage, and who seemed to embody in her person the most if not all the virtues of the most select Edinburgh society. Her daughter resembled her in looks, but not at all in nature. The milk of human kindness was there, inherited from her father, who, left to himself, would have been the most genial of men. Unlike Biddy Horne, however, Mary Inglis could not assert herself. Convention, as represented by the iron-willed mother, was too strong for her. She was still in leading strings. Such was Biddy's view of her friend, to whom she was sincerely attached. Mrs. Inglis was Biddy's bête-noire. She was always at her worst in her presence, goaded by her prim and proud manner to all sorts of breaches of the conventional law. Mrs. Inglis thought Biddy an impossible person, and deplored Mary's intimacy with her. The relations between the two families were not of the cordial nature, which, in view of an approaching alliance, might have been expected. Horne greeted them stiffly. He had his own pride, and would not be patronised by them. Mrs. Inglis resented his standoffishness, and had been disappointed that he did not seem to realise the privilege of their acquaintance, and their condescension in accepting his son. He had, indeed, refused their invitation so often that she had left off asking him. Frankly, except for their money, Mrs. Inglis would not have known the Hornes. In their case, as is usual with the rich, their possessions had been doubled by the public tongue.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Horne," she said, giving him the tips of three chilly fingers. "I hope I see you well."

Like Biddy, the manner and words roused a contradictory spirit in Horne. He longed to say he was as well as could be expected in such a chilly atmosphere. He just bit his lip in time, and murmured the conventional phrases suitable to the occasion. She seated

herself then on the edge of the chair, and put up her lorgnette, a new possession, which she wore on every available occasion because she imagined it added somewhat to her personal dignity.

"I hope Lord Kilmartin is well," said Horne, groaning inwardly as he saw Biddy retiring with Mary to the furthest corner of the room, where they immediately

dropped into confidential talk.

"He is quite well, thank you. The Lunan succession case has occupied him so long that he is rather tired. To-day he accepted an invitation from Sir William Fettes to go out to Drem for the week-end. We have just dropped him at the station, which accounts for our early call."

"It will do him good. I wish I could get a few week-ends, or that I could spare the time to go to Monte Carlo with Biddy. That's what I need."

Monte Carlo with Biddy. That's what I need."

"But why can't you? You have two sons, and surely ought to take a little leisure now," she said severely. The opening, in her opinion, was opportune. She was not at all satisfied with the present position and the immediate prospects of her future son-in-law, and was constantly urging her husband to ask Mr. Horne what he was prepared to do for the young people. But after his one experience Kilmartin had wisely declined to repeat it. For Horne had undoubtedly snubbed him, and appeared to take it into very little account the honour of an alliance with them.

"My sons are still in their swaddling clothes, Mrs. Inglis, unfortunately, where the business is concerned. Whether it is my fault or theirs I am unable to say."

"Yours, I should say," she assured him, priding herself on her tact. "I have known men like you, very clever men, who would never give anybody a chance. It is your absolute duty to take your sons into partnership now, and retire yourself, gradually, of course, but completely, from the business. You have earned some leisure now, you know."

She added these words persuasively, perceiving the cloud on her listener's face.

"Madam, if I were to do that, believe me, there

would soon be no business," he replied bluntly.
"Then you have not done your duty by these boys," she said severely. "Gilbert has more than once complained to me. I have his confidence, Mr. Horne."

"Have you? It is more than his father has," replied

Horne gloomily.

"Ah, that is explainable by your attitude towards him," she said sweetly. "He was at our house last night, and we had a long talk. I felt very sorry for him; in fact, that is why I am here to-day, and I am very glad to have this opportunity of a private word with

Horne made no answer, but glanced out of the window at which he sat. Far down the avenue he saw two figures coming up on foot, and wondered whether it would be the Gerards. Anyhow, it was fresh callers, and would perhaps end this cross-examination, to a man

of his temperament particularly irritating.

"The poor boy feels that you neither understand nor appreciate him, Mr. Horne. It is often a mistake parents make, and sometimes their eyes are opened by others."

"Indeed they are," responded Mr. Horne with some

fervour.

"Now, a little sympathy and, above all, a little encouragement," she suggested, "and you have a different son. I do not deny that perhaps in the past he may have been a little lax; but now, having the incentive which—is to unite our interests, Mr. Horne, don't you think you might put him on a different footing? He is longing to distinguish himself. I am sure we often make a mistake with our children, forgetting that they have grown up. We ought to give them a little more responsibility; it is responsibility which brings out the latent strength."

"Yes," said Horne, but the monosyllable had no meaning, being simply uttered as an acknowledgment of her words.

His indifferent response to the arguments she was at such pains to advance began to irritate her. She was naturally quick-tempered, and was besides fully conscious of her own condescension in taking so much trouble.

She regarded him with her severest look.

"I understand and sympathise more than ever with Gilbert, Mr. Horne. To have such a philanthropic reputation in Edinburgh, you can be a very hard man."

Horne faintly smiled. He was in a corner, undoubtedly, for it was obvious that he could not communicate his fears regarding Gilbert's conduct to his future mother-in-law. He glanced towards Mary, and the beautiful pose of her head awakened in him a sudden admiration. She was undoubtedly too good for Gilbert; the best thing he would wish her was that the engagement should never end in marriage. He rose as if he desired to end the conversation, and at the moment other callers were announced—one of the University Professors and his wife, whom the Hornes knew well. Relief dawned on Horne's face as he escaped from Mrs. Inglis, who surveyed the newcomers with her usual cool, rather impertinent stare.

As Horne passed by the corner where Mary sat he dropped a kind hand on her shoulder, and his whole

manner changed.

"I hope you are very well, my dear. If there were not so many people in the room I should certainly kiss you, you look so bonny to-day."

She smiled, and the colour rose in her face.

"Thank you, Mr. Horne. Do come and talk to me soon. I have so many things to say to you, and I see

you so seldom."

"I'll come back to you, my dear, as soon as I have paid my respects to Daddy," he said, with an irreverent smile. By such nickname was the genial Professor known even outside the particular classroom that had

been responsible for its inception.

Mary sat in her corner and waited with some impatience until Horne came back to her side. Then she made room on the seat for him.

"I want to know why you never come to see us at Moray Place. You know that we want you to come

very much."

"I am not a society man," he replied, a trifle lamely. "See how poor an appearance I make in a drawingroom."

Mary shook her head.

"You are shuffling," she said severely. "Pray excuse the word; it expresses so exactly what I mean, and I believe I got it from Biddy. Do you think I might ask you something here, Mr. Horne-something which is weighing on my mind?"

"There is nobody paying attention to us at the present moment, my dear," he said, but would have slipped away if he could, so fearful was he to be questioned

concerning Gilbert.

"It is about Gilbert," she said in a low voice. "There is something the matter; I don't exactly know what, but I feel it, and-and things are very uncomfortable at home."

He looked sympathetic, but grave in the extreme.

"What sort of thing, do you think, is the matter?" he asked vaguely. "I hope Gilbert is not unappreciative of his high privilege. When I saw you come into the room this afternoon I could only wonder at his

presumption."

"Hush!" she said quickly. "Don't speak like that. I hear so much of it. I don't think that is the way to get the best out of any one-to be always decrying them, I mean. It seems to me that Gilbert wants encouragement. Lately he has been so very depressed about himself, and very humble, for you see," she added with a charming touch of frankness, "it is not his nature to be humble. He says you are very angry with him. What has he done to make you so angry? I think I have the right to know."

She spoke with both dignity and sweetness, and

Horne was entirely at a loss.

"I will not hide from you, my dear, that I have been dissatisfied with him for some considerable time. He has never applied himself, as he ought, to business. He has acted on the presumption that I am a rich man and that he will reap the benefit, but neither he nor his brother will reap the benefit they have not earned."

"I don't know about Gilbert, Mr. Horne, but I have always felt that Walter ought not to be in the works."

"You share that heresy—and, pray, why not? It is a good business, and there is scope in it for all sorts of energies."

"Yes, but he is a scholar and a student; why, it is

written all over him, if I may put it like that."

"As regards Gilbert, Mary, I hope you do your duty in trying to keep him up to the mark."

"I do, but I revolt against it, too; I should like him

to be above that."

"Perhaps you are regretting the engagement?" said

Horne quickly.

"Not so far as that; perhaps it was a little hasty. We did not know one another very well. But we must make the best of it now. What was mamma saying to

you? She looked so very solemn."

"She said practically what you have said, that I am too hard on Gilbert; I cannot think that myself, but I will inquire into my conduct when I have time," he said, with a somewhat comical touch of dejection. "It seems to me, Mary, that it is hard for the modern parent to live up to the modern child. Things were not so when I was young."

"Oh, you forget, I am sure your mother at least was hopelessly indulgent to you," she said, shaking her

finger at him

"I believe she was. Well, at least, I promise you that I will inquire into my conduct, and try and improve it. These sweet eyes of yours would melt a heart of stone, and I hope mine is not quite that."

"There's Elsie Gerard, Mr. Horne," said Mary sud-

denly.

"Then I must do my duty. You will admit that the boys ought to have been here, then I might have had a chance to enjoy myself."

"Never mind. Virtue is its own reward," she said,

as she smilingly let him go.

CHAPTER XVII

EDINBURGH SOCIETY

MARY rose at the same moment, and crossed the room, being beckoned by the uplifting of her

mother's lorgnette.

"Sit down beside me a moment. I don't know the half of these people. I must say one has to meet a queer crowd here," said Mrs. Inglis. "What was Mr. Horne saying to you?"

"Nothing much," answered Mary, but without look-

ing at her mother.

"I fancied from the manner of both of you that it was Gilbert you talked about. Why is he not here, Mary? He knew we were coming. It looks as if he were tiring of us. We cannot stand much more of this sort of thing."

Mary made no response. She was accustomed to her mother's severity of speech, and had perhaps learned

not to allow it to disturb her too much.

"The affair is most unsatisfactory," pursued Mrs. Inglis. "And I am afraid, except for the substantial advantages we might reasonably look forward to, must be regarded as undesirable. I am sorry your father was not firmer with old Horne when it was under discussion. He does not appear to appreciate the sacrifice we make."

"What sacrifice, mamma?"

Mrs. Inglis looked at her daughter severely.

"You are wilfully tantalising, my dear, because you (125)

know perfectly well what I mean. The match is not one of which we can be proud, and you are our only girl. These people are parvenus, and old Horne glories in it. He prides himself on working with his coat off, a particularly vulgar pride peculiar to the self-made man. And he seems disinclined to do his duty by his sons. I should not wonder if he thought a flat or one of those jerry-built houses out on the south side would be good enough for you when you are Mrs. Gilbert Horne. If so, he has reckoned without his host."

Still Mary made no response. She did not like the trend of her mother's remarks, but there was no escape

from them.

"It is perfectly sinful the waste of opportunities in a man like Mr. Horne. Your father says his wealth is fabulous, but where are the evidences? This place is very nice, oh, yes, but look at the shabbiness of the carpet. Then your father says he is really the people's choice for West Edinburgh, yet he absolutely declines to stand. Says he can't afford the time. What a chance to lose, if he has ability, and I suppose he must have, of a kind, to have got on so well. He might distinguish himself, and even get a knighthood. Nothing easier with means behind. It only requires a little tact, a quality which old Horne does not understand."

"'You are very hard on him, mamma."

"Not harder than he deserves. I tell you, to a woman like myself who knows the value of opportunities, and who prides herself on not having lost one in this life, it is particularly aggravating. Now, who on earth are these people? There ought to be a dictionary or something or labels on them, for one never meets them anywhere else. Who is that man talking to Biddy?"

"I think that is Mr. Gerard, a brother of Elsie Gerard, who works at the mission, at least they came in together. Do you see her, that pretty girl in the

dark blue frock?"

"I see her. She is certainly handsome, but I want to know who they are, and why we meet them here."

"Nobody in particular, I fear, mamma. They live in a flat in Nelson Street, and he, I think, is a clerk in Howard & Payne's. Bob knows him."

Mrs. Inglis almost stamped her foot.

"I call it unpardonable to invite such a motley crew on one's day at home. It is insulting to people of our standing. Now, that old fossil in the black silk and the curtain veil just coming in looks as if she had come out of the ark. Where does she come from?"

"Oh, that's Miss Laurence, Biddy's old governess; but she is quite irreproachable, mamma. I believe her

father was a Dean of St. Andrews."

"Well, but Biddy need not have that sort of person on her at-home day. They should be invited by themselves. These Gerards, for instance. It is inexcusable, and I shall tell Biddy. I am looking at the man. He has so much assurance, and look at his red tie. I should not be at all surprised to hear that he is a revolutionary or something—one of those outsiders who harangue people at street corners, and cry "Down with everything". He looks just like it. Upon my word, Biddy is bringing him here."

Mary smiled behind her muff, secretly enjoying the situation. It was so like Biddy, to whom the social conventions of the most exclusive city in the world were anathema, existing only to be defied. And apparently she was the happier for it. Her smiling face was quite unconscious as she came up the room by Gerard's side. He had a distinguished air. Mary admired him in spite of her mother's wholesale condemnation, and even decided that the red tie was singularly becoming to his dark colouring.

larly becoming to his dark colouring

He was very tall, and carried himself well, with a military air. He had a fine head and a clean-shaven face, which brought out all the strength of his features. The mouth was the distinguished feature, grave, sen-

sitive, yet with a mobile sweetness. He was a man whose appearance would be noted anywhere. Biddy seeing him for the first time that day was delighted.

"I have brought Elsie's brother to you, dear. Mr. Humphrey Gerard-Miss Inglis and Mrs. Inglis, if she

Mrs. Inglis gave her stiffest bow, but Mary held out will permit me." a frank hand. She coloured a little at the manifest rudeness of her mother's bearing, which Gerard, however, seemed to accept with equanimity. His eyes were riveted on the face of Mary Inglis. He thought her beautiful, with a rare beauty of womanliness and strength. He felt that she was worth talking to.

"Mamma, there is Lady Minto," cried Mary quickly, hoping that the announcement of a name much revered in their own set would mollify her. The little ruse succeeded, and immediately, without a word of apology to Gerard, she sailed up the room to greet the lady who had just entered. But a close observer looking on at the little scene might have noticed that the effusive delight of greeting was all on one side. The elderly, sweet-faced and very plainly dressed woman did not like Mrs. Inglis, and gave her very little encouragement. She had come to see the Hornes, and to be specially kind to Biddy, whose mother she had known and loved.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Gerard?" said Mary, looking up at that tall figure standing not awkwardly,

though silently, in front of her.

Gerard accepted the invitation. "I am a stranger here," he observed, "and not much accustomed to such occasions. I came with my sister."

"Oh, yes. I must speak to Elsie. How well she is

looking to-day." "She is enjoying herself, and Mr. Horne is truly kind. He has that rare faculty of being able to bring out the very best that is in one. To a business man such a possession must be invaluable."

"It must be, but though I like Mr. Horne immensely, I have never thought that about him," said Mary, in a puzzled voice. "He has the reputation of being rather blunt and plain-spoken, and even gives offence in certain quarters."

"He would not suffer humbug, I should think," ob-

served Gerard quietly.

"I think you know my brother Bob?" said Mary presently. "He has spoken of you to me. You know that we are losing him, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. He has even suggested that I should

accompany him to British Columbia."

"Oh, surely that would be a pity," said Mary a little impulsively, then coloured, feeling that she had made a remark it would be difficult to explain.

"Would you mind telling me why?"

"Well, I suppose I must now I have perpetrated that unfortunate remark. It is a pity, don't you think, that we should give up our best to the colonies?"

"You are very kind to say that, but I am afraid I

must admit that I have been a failure here."

"Don't say that. Perhaps you have had no oppor-

tunity. I prefer to believe that."

Her dark eyes full of a perfect sincerity met his, and a curious expression leaped into his own. Her clear, well-cut profile, her broad, thoughtful brow, and earnest eyes all betokened a well-balanced mind and an intellect of no mean order. Also she had sympathy, which to one in his position was singularly grateful. In fact, it was the quality so strong in Mary Inglis that was his undoing that afternoon.

"I have heard people say that the strong man makes opportunities, but there are circumstances where even the strong man feels himself powerless. Your brother, I have no doubt, has acquainted you with the soul-

destroying routine of a lawyer's office?"

"It has its drudgery, of course, and must be gone through, even by those who have risen. My father

had to go through just the same treadmill. There is

no royal road," she said.

"I believe that, but then it suited the bent of his mind. He was never in any doubt as to his future, he mapped it out for himself, and his exceptional ability enabled him to adhere to his own programme. Your brother has explained all that to me."

"And what, may I ask, is your bent? I am sure you don't look as if you would enjoy counting sheep or cows, or whatever it is they have out there where

Bob is going."

Gerard laughed.

"In happier circumstances, I should have entered the army."

"Why the army?"

"Why the army?"
"My father is a soldier."

Mary sat still a moment deeply surprised, but afraid to ask another question lest she should hear that his father was in the ranks. Not that it would have mattered very much to her, but if it came to her mother's knowledge it would mean instant severance from the Gerards. She might even be forbidden to speak to Elsie, of whom she was genuinely fond.

Gerard watched her face, quite conscious that a mask had been suddenly drawn over it. Her expression as she stared straight before her, into the middle of the room where the throng was thickest, was quite blank.

"You do not approve of the army, perhaps?"

"Oh, why should I approve or disapprove? It has to exist, and we have many friends in it, though, of course, we do not belong to the military set. It is so amusing in Edinburgh, each little coterie is so exactly defined, and each has its little vineyard, as it were, to cultivate. You should hear Biddy—I mean Miss Horne—on it. Do you know Miss Horne well?"

"No, I see her to-day for the first time."

"She is handsome, don't you think, and so very clever? Her tongue is feared by a good many, but

her heart is really so kind that she would not willingly hurt anybody. And it is certain that she fears nothing under the sun."

"There is a strong resemblance between her father

and herself."

"Do you think so? I have never noticed it, but they are devoted to one another. Look, that is Mr. Walter Horne, who has just come in, the eldest son."

"Not the only one?"

"No, there is another," she answered, and he wondered why her colour rose. It troubled him, but he dared not put another question.

"If you will excuse me, I should like to speak to your sister. I have not seen her since we gave that mission treat, and I think she is disengaged just now."

With a little bow and a smile she left him. His eyes followed her stately carriage as she crossed the room; he saw no one else.

Presently the cheerful voice of his host broke the

spell.

"I hope you need not hurry away, Mr. Gerard. A little later, when the people begin to slacken a bit, you and I will have a smoke downstairs."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE OFFER

ONE by one the guests dropped away. Mrs. Inglis and her daughter were the first to depart, as they

had been the first to arrive.

"Remember what I've said, Mr. Horne," she said with a suggestive smile as their host accompanied them to the door of the drawing-room. "I shall quite expect

my advice to bear fruit."

"When we are old we don't take kindly to advice, Mrs. Inglis; we are better at offering it," he replied. "But I promise you I won't forget yours. Good-bye, my dear," he added to Mary. "Come again soon; the place is brighter for your presence." He pressed her hand, and after a moment's hesitation raised it to his lips.

"The man has manners and savoir-faire, Mary," her mother observed as they passed down the stairs. "His usual conduct is therefore the more reprehensible. Did you find out anything more about these Gerards?"

"Nothing much; but their father is an army man."

"An army man! Probably a sergeant or something of that sort. Did any one try to explain to you why Gilbert wasn't there?"

Mary shook her head, and her colour rose a little.

Fully conscious herself of the many lapses from the lover-like attention she had the right to expect, she was yet extremely sensitive to any strictures passed upon him. But Mrs. Inglis took small heed of such sensibilities. She prided herself upon getting to the bottom of things.

Mary was weary of the subject of Gilbert's short-comings and the apparent inability of his family to see on which side the obligation lay long before they reached home, though she suffered her mother to babble on without the slightest contradiction, having proved that the easiest way.

Meanwhile the atmosphere at Burton Lea became more genial. Biddy made an excellent hostess. While apparently making no effort, she placed people at their ease, and some who had come to see and criticise the young mistress of Burton Lea had to admit that she was a personality that would make her influence felt.

The Gerards lingered because they were pressed to do so. At last Horne felt that he might retire, especially as Walter came in to take his place. He beckoned Gerard to come with him, and presently they found themselves alone together in the library—Horne's favourite room in the house, where he spent the greater part of his leisure.

"I suppose some such arrangement is necessary," he said with a small grimace as he opened the cupboard to get the cigars. "But this always seems to me grotesque; not my idea of hospitality. It will be refreshing to hear Biddy's views. I should not wonder if this proved to be her first and last at-home day as understood by Edinburgh society."

Gerard smiled a little at these words, which entirely

expressed his own view.

"Miss Horne can give a touch of individuality to

whatever she does," he ventured to remark.

"Oh, granted. Biddy is certainly not conventional. I suppose she has inherited her views on hospitality. Her mother was old-fashioned in that respect. She invited people to spend the day or to eat a good meal, but never paid calls in the ordinary sense. Mrs. Inglis has been drilling her, but I fear she will not prove a very apt pupil. I observed several signs of rebellion in her this afternoon."

"Mrs. Inglis is an intimate friend?"

"Hardly that, but my son Gilbert is to marry her

daughter.

Gerard gave a little start, and a curious expression came into his eyes. He happened to know Gilbert Horne well by sight, and had seen him twice within the last fortnight under circumstances which made the present announcement inexplicable to him. But it was not his mission in life to upset the family peace of any house; besides, he was by no means sure of his ground.

"Is this marriage likely to take place soon?"

"Well, they have been engaged for a year, but there is no immediate talk of it. They are young enough, and my son is not in a position to keep a wife at present," said Horne briefly. "Did your father tell you the substance of our talk the other afternoon?"

"He did, sir, and I am at a loss to thank you for your kind interest in me. I have done nothing to deserve it."

"Tut, tut! That is not the question at all. If I have been kind it cuts both ways. I am in need of some one at my works in whom I can place implicit confidence, one who will do what he is told intelligently, and apply himself to learning the business, as I understand it, and think it should be learned."

"But, sir, I am totally ignorant of business."

"So much the better. Then you will be the more plastic. That is what is the matter with most of the young men of to-day—they know more than their fathers at a very early age, or think they do," he added grimly. "I may tell you in confidence that my son Walter will not remain at Bonnygate. He has definitely decided to break away, to follow out his own bent. I confess that where he is concerned I made a mistake. But it was a natural mistake, Mr. Gerard, for when a man builds up a business such as mine he naturally expects that his own flesh and blood will take an interest in it. Fact is, they talk too much about temperament and that other word which sickens me-I mean environment. In the days when we had to make our own, strong men were born, who talked less and worked more."

Gerard sat silent, conscious of the bitterness of soul underlying these words, sympathising with them to a certain point, but fully conscious that he had no right to comment upon them.

"I want to know what your views are on these two points," said Horne abruptly, "because if you decide to accept the offer I will make presently, upon that would depend the success or failure of our future relationship."

"I have not thought about it, sir. My chief desire at the present moment is, I am afraid, a very sordid one.

I want to make money."

Horne laughed a genial laugh.

"That simplifies matters very considerably; brings them at once to a platform with which I am perfectly familiar. You are quite right. Money is power; it is the lever which moves many of the forces that control destiny. Only it must be used in conjunction with strong principle, and such ideals as it is possible to preserve in the process of making it. Wealth rightly used is a power untold."

"We have suffered all our lives from the lack of it," said Gerard frankly. "As a child I was familiar with money troubles in the house. My mother never had enough, and now on half-pay we have suffered considerable privation. I am sorry for my father. He has had a hard life, and little of life's comforts. If I could do anything to ease it for him now I should think no sacrifice

too great."

Horne was conscious of a sudden quick sensation of envy. He had become, through much brooding, abnormally sensitive regarding the attitude of his sons towards

him, and scarcely did them justice.

"Your father cannot have suffered so much, having children whose sentiments are those you have just uttered," he said a trifle formally. "It is what ought to be, if there has been common duty done in the family.

I honour you for what you have said, and it confirms me in my decision to give you a chance to improve your position, if you care to accept it."

Gerard, who had come to Burton Lea that afternoon in no way puffed up with expectation, his mind being a singularly well balanced one, listened to the words

without any sign of undue elation.

He had already suffered many disappointments, and had learned in a hard school to expect but little benefit from fate. But the time had come when he had decided to make a bid on his own account for a better position, and Horne's proposal came at an opportune crisis.

Horne then proceeded to explain with considerable minuteness the nature and scope of his business, the lines upon which he wished it extended, and gave Gerard a choice of two positions in the works.

"The clerical part, that which my son Walter presently gives up, I know you are well trained in, but, frankly speaking, it is in the laboratory I should like to see you. Gilbert can take his brother's place in the counting-house. I have spent hundreds of pounds on his education, but he does not care for the laboratory, and has no initiative there. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Perfectly, sir. I am ignorant of everything but the elements of chemistry, but I am interested in it. I could work under a capable man, and at the same time attend a chemistry class at night. There are many ways in which a man can help himself to get on if he is really in earnest."

Horne nodded in deep satisfaction.

"Precisely, precisely. We begin to understand one another. At the works there is a man called Bannerman. He has been in my employment for nearly thirty years. As far as he goes he is good, nay, excellent; in fact, he is practically the head of the department we are talking about, and could give Gilbert points all round. Gilbert trusts to this man too much, because

his own mind does not naturally lend itself to independent research or experiment. I don't happen to know at the present moment what it does lend itself to," he added grimly. "Well, to come to the point, will you take a place in the laboratory, and not be above taking your cue from Bannerman?"

"I am not above anything, Mr. Horne. I realise that I am getting the chance of a lifetime, and if I take it, believe me, I will try to justify your extraordinary kindness. But your son, will he not resent this step on

your part?"

"No, there will be no ground for that. He frankly says he does not like the laboratory, and this after all the money that has been spent. I will transfer him to another part of the business. He will take his brother's place, and in view of his approaching marriage to Miss Inglis, I will make him a junior partner. That is to say, if he can satisfy me on certain points which are unsatisfactory at the present moment."

"And Mr. Walter?"

"Walter intends, I believe, to go back to college, and qualify himself for the medical profession, so he does not count. I have not released him yet, but he knows that I am considering the situation. If you decide to accept the position I offer you there will be no time lost, and he will be able to enter for the summer session at once."

"If you think I can fulfil your expectations, Mr. Horne, there can be but one answer," said Humphrey Gerard, with that sincere manly note in his voice which Horne specially liked. "I can only say that I will do my utmost, and that if hard work and application can justify your confidence and extraordinary kindness these will not be lacking."

"It is because I am so sure of it that I am making a definite offer," said Horne. "I trust more to my intuitions than most men of my hard training usually do, and I must say they have seldom erred. Oh, yes,

I am aware that I could get plenty of young men to fill the post, many who would be glad to pay a premium for the privilege, but I should be no better off. What I want is a man who has an object in view, who will make my business his hobby and his aim for a time at least, because it represents a certain position which he holds before him. I offer you two hundred for the first year. I know that is double at least what you are earning now. At the end of the first year we shall know where we stand, and rearrange the whole groundwork. There is no reason why in the course of a few years' time, provided you succeed in becoming a specialist in your own department, we should not consider the question of partnership between you and my son. By that time, if the business is in good working order, I shall be glad to retire."

"But, sir, this is too much. I am a perfect stranger

to you. I might disappoint you at every turn."

"You might, but you won't. I think I know my man. Look you, Mr. Gerard, you know what it is to be poor, to want the things money can buy, both for yourself and for those you love. That is the man who appreciates opportunity and who creates it. My boys—it is not their fault—but they will never have that incentive. It is the stumbling-block in the path of every rich man's son. I have made a fortune, that is to say, a small fortune, and I might sell my business or turn it into a limited company; but I love the thing. It is my own making, and I want to keep it as it is now, and to extend it quietly on the very best lines. These are my views. Are you prepared to accept them, and to further them so far as lies in your power?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"Then there's my hand upon it. Tell them at your place on Monday—a week's notice, is it?—then we shall begin the new order of things at Bonnygate on Monday week. In the interval I shall arrange matters with my sons so that you may have a clear field,"

CHAPTER XIX

FATHER AND SON

A BOUT eleven o'clock that night Gilbert returned home. It was not in itself so late an hour, but, inclined to make the most of all Gilbert's derelictions from the path of duty at the moment, Horne counted that he had been away from the house for eight hours. Gilbert saw the light in the library window, and when he put his own latch-key in the door was surprised to find it locked.

Such a thing had never happened before. The lads had been accorded perfect liberty of coming and going since the day when their father had given them their

latch-keys, and told them not to abuse them.

An occasional late night caused no remark, though until recently explanation of it had generally been forthcoming, as it is in all well-regulated families. The locked door could have but one meaning. Gilbert stood on the porch, ruefully tugging at his moustache before he rang the bell. This, however, was rendered unnecessary. Presently he heard the bolts of the library window being undone, and it was thrown open by his father, who had heard his step on the gravel.

"Come in, lad. I thought it was time all decent folk were indoors on a Saturday night, and I locked the door; but I'm not seeking to keep you out all

night.''

His tone, contrary to Gilbert's expectation, was surprisingly gentle. But even had it been the reverse, he

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had no alternative but to accept the invitation, and step

in by the means provided.

His father looked sharply at him as he shut and barred the window, but there was nothing disturbing or unusual in his appearance, and certainly he had not

been drinking. That at least was comforting.

"I should like to know where you have been since two o'clock, Gilbert. Eight hours is a long time to put in anywhere. To an engaged man much latitude is allowed, and nobody expects him to consider his family, but you have not been there."

Gilbert winced slightly.

"No," he replied steadily, "I have not been there."
Horne waited a moment, hoping some further explanation would be forthcoming.

"You don't intend to tell me, then?"

"No, sir, I would rather not."

Horne did not fly into a passion or even show the slightest sign of annoyance. In the quiet of the room during the last hour he had mapped out the whole programme of his conduct towards Gilbert, and his mind was relieved, because he felt that the existing condition of things had better be altered at once, for all their sakes.

"Mary and her mother were here this afternoon. It was your sister's first at-home day, and you might have made an effort to be here. But, no matter. I had some talk with them both, and they, no less than

I, are a prey to considerable anxiety."

"Why?" he asked. "I am surprised. I have been there twice this week."

Horne shrugged his shoulders.

"You don't display the devotion usual in the circumstances, and which your fiancée has the right to expect.

There can be but one ending to it all, Gilbert."

He made no reply. He stood by the table looking down as if studying the pattern of the carpet. His father regarded him keenly, even with a yearning look. He seemed old for his years at the moment, he thought, yet there was a boyish wistfulness in his look.

"We are forced to the conclusion that there is an entanglement of some sort. Would it not be better to own up, and let us see whether something can't be done to clear the air? The present condition of things is not pleasant for any of us, and there is nothing more trying to a man of my temperament than to be continually finding fault; in fact, I can't go on with it."

"I have been trying to do better at the works, sir,"

said Gilbert quickly.

"Granted; but things are not as I should like them,

and I have decided to make a change."

Gilbert started, and looked his father straight in the face for the first time.

"Chuck me?" he said expressively.

Horne faintly smiled.

"It would be a drastic course. I don't go so far as to say you deserve that, Gilbert. I would be just if I could. Besides, you are my son, and dear to me, though lately we don't seem to have been sailing in the same boat."

Gilbert returned to his study of the carpet. He did not like the turn the conversation was taking, in fact, it made a cold shiver run through him. If his father became emotional, an attitude of mind so rare as to make the deepest impression, he felt that it would be all up with him. For Gilbert was miserable enough in his own mind and in absolute doubt as to what to do next. Lily, instead of becoming more amenable, was more insistent that he should spend all his spare time with her.

"You wouldn't mind, perhaps, being chucked?" said Horne suggestively.

"I should deserve it perhaps, but I should be on my

beam ends," he said frankly.

"Well, I had not thought of it. This week I have been going carefully into all the details and returns of the department for which you're supposed to be responsible, and I have found it wanting. I have this very day made other arrangements, and in a week's time the laboratory will pass into other management."

"Whose?" asked Gilbert eagerly.

"Bannerman's in the first instance, but I have engaged a younger man who will work under Bannerman until such time as he is fitted to take the lead."

"And what becomes of me?"

"You will take Walter's place. Walter has finally decided, and I have given my consent for him to leave Bonnygate, and to go to the University again to qualify for the medical profession, and to live his own life on his own lines."

"Walter will be a happy man," said Gilbert, who was no stranger to his brother's real ambition. Indeed, when they were younger, and there had been a more brotherly confidence between them, they had often

discussed it together.

"You take Walter's place. It requires no special aptitude, and I shall remain in command myself. But in view of your marriage with Miss Inglis I have decided to take you into partnership. It may be that they are quite justified in expressing their dissatisfaction with your position at the works."

Gilbert flushed all over his face. The announcement was so totally unexpected that it had almost overwhelmed him. Expecting nothing but blame and perhaps punishment, his father's sudden action seemed

inexplicable.

"This will improve your position with the Inglises, and at least," he added somewhat ungallantly, "shut the mouth of your future mother-in-law. I had a long talk with Mary this afternoon. She is a sweet woman. I hope you will be worthy of her, Gilbert. There are many men who would envy you."

Gilbert made no reply, and his father was not re-

assured by the expression of his face.

"So you will be able to go to them to-morrow afternoon. They will expect to see you to luncheon probably, and tell them the good news. On Monday we shall draw out the draft of the deed of partnership. Your income in the course of the next six months will be amply sufficient for you to marry and set up in a style with which even your wife's people will be pleased. I wish I saw you look a happier and prouder man, Gilbert."

Gilbert appeared to swallow something in his throat. "I am overwhelmed, sir," he said thickly at last. "You see, I have never expected anything of this sort; in fact, a partnership seemed an impossibility. You must understand how completely bewildered I feel."

"It is Mary you have to thank, and I hope you will thank her. I hope, too, that when you come back from Moray Place to-morrow you will be able to tell me you have fixed the day. The sooner the better, now that the chief obstacle is removed. There is no sense in a long engagement, and nothing will please me better than to hear that we look forward to a wedding, say, about Easter time."

"I think I'll go to bed. I feel a bit bowled over. I am very grateful, sir, and I wish I deserved it better."

He left the room immediately, and though Horne felt inclined to call him back he refrained. The interview had not been so satisfactory as he might reasonably have expected after the tremendous concession he had made. He sighed as he put out the lights, and

went upstairs to bed.

The whole problem was by no means disposed of yet. That was the impression left on his mind. But at least he had done his best to solve it. Other means having failed, he now tried the throwing of a heavy responsibility with its accompanying compensations on his younger son, and could only wait results. A sense of duty well done gave him what he needed badly, a sound sleep, and he awoke on the quiet Sabbath morning,

wakened indeed by the sweet tinkle of the early church bells of Cramond, with a rested feeling both of body and mind. As he was dressing, he saw Gilbert in the grounds with the dogs at his heels, and waved to him from the window. They all met at breakfast, and though the subject was not alluded to, it was in both the lads' minds.

Biddy, as yet unaware of the contemplated change, was bright and happy as usual, rattling on merrily

about the experiences of the past afternoon.

They attended the Parish Church of Cramond, walking thither as a family, not one member absent that bright, glorious morning, which had nothing of winter gloom about it. Gilbert was distinctly subdued, and his father liked the attitude, taking it as a sign that he was beginning to realise that life was a bigger thing than he had yet deemed it.

He left them at the church door after service, and they inferred that he had gone to luncheon at Moray

Place, as he usually did on Sundays.

Walter walked home with one of their neighbours,

and Biddy was left with her father.

"Was Gibbie late last night again, and did you scold him, dad? He looked so prim and proper this

"He was not very late, but we had rather a serious talk last night. I had better tell you what is going to happen. Biddy, Walter is leaving the works and going back to college, and I am taking Gilbert into partner-

Biddy stood still on the crisp path, and stared, her

bright eyes wide with wonderment.

"Why, dad, what a tremendous upheaval! But I am very glad, for the boys' sakes. Being a girl, I don't understand these things very well, only I knew things were wrong. That is why Walter is so quietly jubilant, and perhaps why Gibbie looks so subdued. Yet, why should he? It ought to have made him deliriously happy, for now I suppose he and Mary

can be married soon."

"I am afraid there is something on Gilbert's conscience, but it is my hope that he will get rid of it soon. I have something more to tell you, Biddy. I have offered young Gerard, Gilbert's place, at least it practically amounts to that, after he has had the necessary training."

"Why, dad, you're going at a tremendous pace. When did all this earthquake occur? What brought

about the preliminary shocks?"

"Well, the thing has been working towards this conclusion for a good while, my dear, and I hope it will

prove a successful arrangement."

"I am so glad for the Gerards, for now Humphrey will not need to go abroad with Bob Inglis. Elsie has been so afraid of it; she would miss him terribly."

"He's not dying to go abroad, Biddy. This will suffice, and I think I shall not regret it. Do you?"

"I am sure you won't. Don't you think he is not a common man, dad? I was surprised when I saw him yesterday, for though Elsie is a dear, she is not distinguished."

"A sweet little girl, though, with a woman's forethought and tenderness. She is wonderful at home."

"Oh, you have seen her there. I have not, you see,"

said Biddy.

"Yes, that is true. Shall we take a walk in this afternoon, you and I, and pay a call there? I would rather like to hear what the Captain is saying about things."

Biddy assented with sparkling eyes.

And they went on to the house perfectly satisfied with one another, and without the shadow of a cloud between them.

CHAPTER XX

THE REAPER

BIDDY HORNE long remembered that walk with her father on the outskirts of Edinburgh. Never had he been a more delightful companion. It seemed as if all the fret and worry of the last fortnight had completely melted away. There was a boyishness and quiet fun about him to which she was only too happy to respond.

"I suppose it is the spring in the air, dad," she said smilingly, "but we both seem in ridiculously high

spirits, don't we?"

He assented smilingly, and in such mood they came to the more sober precincts of the city, where the influence of spring, perhaps, was less perceptible. Directly they came within sight of the block of buildings in which the Gerards lived, Horne observed the blinds all down at their flat.

"Biddy, surely there can't be any trouble," he said

quickly. "All the blinds are down."

Biddy looked aghast and shook her head. Involuntarily they hastened their steps to inquire. The street door was open, and they did not wait to ring the bell there, but ascended the stairs at once.

Then Horne knocked softly, both feeling conscious of

some tragedy within.

Elsie opened the door. She betrayed no surprise at the sight of them, but smiled wanly, as she responded to Biddy's kiss.

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"We are in great trouble," she said simply. "My father is dead."

"It is impossible!" cried Horne. "Why, he was in the best of health and spirits the other day we met."

"It was very sudden. Come in. Humphrey has had to go out and my mother is asleep. I am quite alone." Biddy slipped her hand through her arm, and Horne followed them into the darkened room, and they stood still looking at one another almost blankly.

"What was the cause?" asked Horne with a great

gentleness. "Was there any shock or seizure?"

"None. Yesterday morning he seemed as well as he had ever been in his life. He had some letters from India which pleased him very much, and he was not out at all until the afternoon."

Her voice broke a little, and she sank into the nearest chair as if her courage had suddenly failed her. Horne stood by with an infinite compassion in his eyes. He seemed to realise in a moment the burden which must now press upon these young, slender shoulders.

To her remained now the ceaseless vigil, the care of the helpless creature who was still left, a cumberer of

the ground.

"I think Humphrey did say he might call at your house when he had seen to the necessary things. Father will be buried at Warriston Cemetery on Wednesday."

"He appeared quite well last night, you thought?"

asked Horne anxiously.

"Oh, yes; only in the morning he said how well he felt, and made the remark that we should all be happier now spring was coming. He never liked the Edinburgh winters; after India they made him suffer too much."

"He certainly looked the picture of health when I

was here the other afternoon.

"Oh, yes; he really had very good health, and he was so bright and happy last night and so interested in the happy afternoon we had had. He seemed just as usual when we went to bed. My mother called us

about four o'clock, and said she could not wake him. We found that he was dead."

"What did the doctor say?" asked Horne, not yet

recovered from the painful shock.

"Oh, quite natural causes. His heart was very weak. And yesterday he had a very long walk while we were at Burton Lea, and came in very tired. But he had quite recovered by the time we got home. You know how late it was, and, as I said, he was very happy for the rest of the evening."

She spoke very quickly, and, looking from one to

another, she presently went on:-

"I feel that you are such kind friends, I may speak out quite openly. He—he felt things terribly. His spirit was so proud, and somehow he has not seemed to recover from the last anxiety we had about my mother. It seemed to prey on his mind that you had found her and brought her home. You see, it is like that with some troubles, one never gets used to them."

"How is she to-day?" asked Horne quickly.

"She has been sleeping most of the day. I am afraid she has taken some chloral. She sometimes gets that when there is nothing else. We never know where she gets the drugs, just as we never know where she gets the stimulant. Nobody ever does in these cases. There seems to be nothing left but to endure."

Horne's thoughts wandered to the question of means,

as was natural to a man of his habit of mind.

"What can we do to help you, dear," asked Biddy

tenderly. "Let me stay with you until all is over."

Elsie shook her head, and for a moment rested her cheek on the hand lying on her shoulder. Horne long remembered that picture of the dark head and fair one so near together in the attitude of sisters. It caused a curious softness to gather about his heart.

Elsie shook her head.

"This would be no place for you, Biddy, and I don't



Horne long remembered that picture of the dark head and fair one so near together.



mind. I have plenty to do, and I will promise not to

be more miserable than I can help."

There was a little catch in her voice, but suddenly it passed, and she looked at Mr. Horne with a swift gratitude.

"Humphrey has gone to tell you how happy your offer made father last night. He felt that Humphrey's chance had come at last. You will know that your kindness helped to brighten his last hours. I was often impatient with him when he was short with poor mother. Nobody knew what he has suffered all these years, and he had a proud spirit."

Horne observed that it was a painful strain of thought,

and tried to change it.

"Has he been able to make any provision for you? You will forgive the question. It is not prompted by

idle curiosity."

"Oh, no; I should never think that. But I am afraid there is nothing left. You see we have always been very poor, and now his small pension will die with him."

"But—but it does not seem right nor just, and surely if representation were made to the proper quarter the case would be considered."

Elsie shook her head.

"We should not like any such representation made. My father would have been the very last to permit it. Oh, we shall do all right, and I must think of something so that we shall not be a burden on Humphrey. He is very good, but he must not be kept back. It is very hard on a young man. I have seen it before."

She spoke quite quietly and with a firmness which told that she had well considered the whole matter.

"There is a very small insurance which will buy a little cottage in the country. That is what I must do with my mother, get her away from the city life, and then I shall devote my life to caring for her and keeping her right. It is what he would have wished."

"It is hard, though," cried Biddy rebelliously. "You are so young, you ought to have something better from

destiny than that."

"Things seem to be unequally divided," said Elsie with a little smile. "But, at least, there is always strength and courage for the day's work. Just for about an hour in the quiet of the early morning to-day I lost heart, but I am all right now."

Horne took a turn across the room. The tumult of his own thoughts would not suffer him to be still. Had Biddy not been there he would have expressed a part of them. Perhaps it was well her restraining influence

was present.

"Would you like to look at him?" asked Elsie presently. "He is just asleep. It is a great comfort. His old friend Colonel Grahame, who has only recently come to Edinburgh, was here a little earlier, and when he saw him he cried like a child. They served together in Chitral, and it was one of the last joys of my father's life that he had come at last to settle in Edinburgh."

Biddy, who had never seen death, passed into the inner room a little doubtfully and fearfully. What has a young bright creature, whose every vein pulses with life, to do with death? It is for the old and the sad, who have done with the things of time. Yet there was

nothing but peace in the darkened room.

The soldier lay upon his camp-bed, as a soldier should, and the majesty of death had brought out all that was best in his fine features and smothered all the sordid lines of the care and anxiety that had embittered the last years of his life.

They did not linger long, but in that moment Biddy could trace in Humphrey Gerard a strong resemblance

to his father, both in face and figure.

She was glad afterwards that she had seen him.

There was very little said. What was there to say in such a case? Death is there, and human hopes are laid low, but the thought uppermost in their minds as they

left the room was that the best had been taken, the use-less left.

"Is there nothing we can do for you?" asked Horne almost desperately, hesitating a moment before they left.

"Nothing; thank you," she replied. "But your kind thoughts help. We can never have too much sympathy. It is what the world needs above everything else."

The words struck them both, and they often spoke of them afterwards.

She accompanied them to the door, where they hesitated again, as if loath to leave her alone with the deep shadows that had fallen across her life.

"Let me stay with you," cried Biddy impulsively. "I could be of some little use really. It is not right

that you should be here quite alone."

Before Elsie could reply a low moaning cry, half of pain, half of fright, sounded through the stillness of the house.

"It is my mother. She is waking up, and will need me," she said hurriedly. "Good-bye. Thank you very much for coming. You will never know how much you have cheered me."

She bade them good-bye hurriedly, and they had no alternative but to go.

"It seems strange and unjust that he should have been taken and the other left," said Biddy with a little shiver as they passed out into the open air once more.

"Cumberers of the ground," said Horne under his

breath

"Father," said Biddy quickly, "Elsie spoke of getting a little cottage in the country. Couldn't we find one for her in Cramond? Then she would be near us, and we could help her. If her brother is going into the works, it would be a good arrangement for everybody, for he would always be at hand when you wanted him."

"An excellent suggestion, and I will inquire tomorrow. There should be no difficulty about it," said

Horne, with great heartiness.

"I'll go down to the village after breakfast to-morrow morning," continued Biddy. "I'll ask Ann Glass first, however. She knows everything about Cramond, and it would be a splendid arrangement, and I am sure Elsie would like it. She thought it all so pretty out beside us when she came yesterday."

Thus did Biddy babble on, making her innocent plans, not knowing how great was to be the issue, how

it would alter the whole current of her life.

CHAPTER XXI

"THAT'S LIFE"

I ILY MORISON was standing at the end of the Portobello Pier looking out to sea. It was a March afternoon, a blowy, blustering day, which drove the waves into battalions of white horses. But there was a suggestion of spring in the air. The sky was high and clear, and in country places the birds were busy and all the spring flowers peering up in sheltered nooks. A pleasant season of the year, and one calculated to drive away depressing thought. But the face of the girl who thus idly watched the heaving grey-blue of the sea wore a bitter, discontented expression. She had nothing in common with spring. She was for the moment without hope for the future. She had given up much—nay, all—and what had she gained? Each day brought home to her only the more forcibly that the love she had imagined would last for ever and be a refuge against any assault of fate, had completely been weaned away from her. The dulness, the intolerable misery of the weeks she had spent in the little home about which she once so fondly dreamed had reached a climax. She was counting the weeks and the days as she stood there battling with the elements without and within, and she told herself that the time to speak had come. Only one more chance she would give him, she told herself. Then she must take some step. But what that step would be she could not tell. a sudden energy in her looks when she turned at last

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and began to retrace her steps, and her face, once so sweet, had hardened. The bitterness of things had entered like iron into her soul.

When she came within sight of Rosearbour she was surprised to behold a carriage in the roadway before the

gate.

Now a carriage was a rare spectacle there. So far as Lily knew there had not been one there since the night of that mad ride out from Edinburgh, and it was with a natural curiosity that she quickened her steps. She had been out about an hour. For a moment a wild hope flashed across her that it might be a visitor for her

But when she opened the gate and got behind the high privet hedge, which like a screen shut off the road, she saw that there was a lady at the door apparently seeking admittance in vain. And she then remembered that Miss Fiddes had gone out to spend the afternoon in

town.

She hastened her steps a little, and then, suddenly, as the figure at the door turned, she stood still in the middle of the path almost aghast. For unless her eyes strangely deceived her, the lady was none other than Miss Inglis. She came forward with that slightly inquiring look which a stranger wears when she wants to ask a question, but when she had looked twice at Lily she appeared slightly puzzled.

"Surely we have met before," she said with a pleasant

smile.

Lily for the moment was entirely at a loss. The only thing she noticed was a great change in the girl she had last seen at the Stockbridge Mission Hall. She had grown much thinner, and her face had a worn look as if she had come through some long illness.

"I remember now. It was at the Sinclair Mission, and you are Miss Oliphant's niece. I am right, am I

not?"

"Yes; quite right," answered Lily, but her voice

sounded hollow in her own ear. Even the look of unconsciousness on Miss Inglis's face scarcely reassured her. She was so bewildered by her appearance there.

"You seem surprised. I came this afternoon to see Miss Fiddes. If you are calling on her, too, I am afraid she is out. I have been ringing quite a long time."

"Yes; she is out. How do you know Miss Fiddes?" asked Lily desperately, too anxious to be at the bottom of the mystery to care how strange her question must

sound in the other's ears.

"She is an old friend of my father's—indeed, a sort of far-away cousin," replied Miss Inglis in a frank matter-of-fact voice. "I was paying a call in Portobello, and suddenly remembered her. I thought I would look her up. You know her, too?"

"Yes: I know her very well."

"Well, we can't help it. Are you going back to town? I am driving, and can take you if you like."

"Oh, no, thank you. I am not going back yet."

"You think she will be back soon, perhaps? You might tell her, if you are so fortunate as to see her, that Miss Inglis, Mary Inglis, called. And please tell her, too, that I have been very ill, and that I am leaving tomorrow for the South of France for a month. Perhaps I might write to her from there, but I shall not be able to come back to see her just now."

"I will tell her," said Lily mechanically. "You look very ill yet," with a sudden curious note in her

voice.

"I've been very bad, but dear Dr. Prentice has pulled me through. Do you ever go to the mission now?"

"Oh, no. I have never been back. I was only there

that night by chance."

"That's a pity. They need more girls to work there."

"Have you seen my aunt lately?" asked Lily, hungering for news of her own people and unwilling to let even this slender chance slip.

"No; I have not seen her for over a month. By-thebye, Miss Horne is going with me to Biarritz. You remember Miss Horne?"

"Yes; quite well."

"She has to come back in time for the election. You know her father has to stand for West Edinburgh after Easter. Well, I must go. Good-bye. I have forgotten your name, but please remember me to your aunt."

She held out a cordial hand, but Lily barely touched it with her fingers. She felt desperate. Another mo-

ment she must have betrayed herself.

"I may as well tell you, though I don't know why I should, that I am going to be married to Miss Horne's brother in the summer after I return," Miss Inglis looked back to say. "I know you will wish me luck. Do join the mission, for if Miss Horne and I both leave,

they will need the places filled."

She nodded and smiled, and went quickly down the steps to the waiting carriage. Lily stood still. She saw her wave her hand with that perfect friendliness which disarmed all bitterness, and the next moment the brougham was out of sight. Lily drew her latch-key from her pocket, and entering the house, closed the door. The old-fashioned wag-at-the-wa' clock in the kitchen, with its curious tinkling bell, gave forth four strokes, as she put down the book she had fetched from the library before she had gone to the pier. She walked into the kitchen, to which she had free access, stirred up the fire, and quickly got the kettle to boil.

Then she made herself a cup of tea. She was standing by the kitchen table drinking it, when she heard her

landlady's key in the door.

They got on very well together, though there were some things about her young lodger which Miss Fiddes could not understand, and several of which she did not approve. She thought her very idle for one thing, and though she was charmed with her readiness to do her full share of the housework, she wished she did not spend

so many hours gazing out of the window and mooning about the sands. Her life seemed so genuinely purposeless that she was often sorry for her, and showed her all the kindness she could. But Lily did not invite her

confidence—nay, she kept her at arm's length.

Miss Fiddes rather admired her for her reticence, and asked no questions. The rent was regularly paid, and when the husband came she was always glad and relieved, though his visits were very short, seldom extending beyond an hour or two's call. But Miss Fiddes suspected nothing. She was by nature guileless, and had very little experience of the seamy side of life.

"Now, my dear, that is not the way to enjoy a meal," she said reprovingly as she beheld the cup and the teapot on the end of the kitchen table. "I have lived a long time alone, but I have never descended to that. I have always respected myself, and waited upon myself.

so to speak."

"I only wanted a drink," answered Lily. "I'm going up to town."

"Are you? It's very tiring there to-day. The wind

gets one at the corners so."

"There's been a lady here to see you—a Miss Inglis."

Miss Fiddes flushed quickly.

"Oh, I am so sorry I have missed her. When did she call? Were you in, and did you ask her to come in

and rest a little and offer her a cup of tea?"

"No; I met her at the gate, and she was in a hurry. She asked me to tell you she had been ill, and that she was leaving for the South of France to-morrow for the benefit of her health."

"Has she really? She is the daughter of Lord Kilmartin, Mrs. Gilbert, who is a second cousin of mine, only you see I am too poor to be recognised by his wife, who is a very proud woman. He used to come and see me sometimes. It was very sweet of her to call."

"She told me another thing," continued Lily steadily. "She's going to be married when she comes back—at

least, in the summer—to a Mr. Horne. Do you know

him?"

"No, though the name is quite well known and respected in Edinburgh. Perhaps I shall call to-morrow at Moray Place if I can summon up my courage. Ah, my dear, you don't know what it is to be very poor and very proud. That haughty woman with her patronising ways causes me to shrivel up. And yet I knew her husband so well in his youth. We were like brother and sister."

Lily could not repress a smile, though the remark did not call for expression or comment. It was born of the irony of the inward thought. Perhaps, after all, she would do well to wait and let destiny work out its own purpose.

"Was she driving in her own carriage?" asked Miss Fiddes with a little touch of pride which Lily's ear de-

tected quickly enough.

"Yes; at least there was a carriage at the gate. I did not ask whether it was her own. It had two horses in it."

"I do wish I had been in," said the little woman in tones of genuine regret. "Things do happen so very contrary."

"Yes, they do," answered Lily quickly. "That's

life."

She took up her gloves from the table and began to draw them on.

"Could you tell me the name of a good lawyer in Edinburgh, Miss Fiddes?" she asked, keeping her eyes on the fastening of her gloves.

Miss Fiddes seemed surprised at the question.

"I used to know several. Let me see. The man who drew up the codicil to my dear father's will was a Mr. Haliburton. Just wait a moment, and I'll get the address from my bureau."

Lily nodded, and, when she was left, walked to the dresser and took a look at herself in the mirror while

she adjusted her veil. She had a high colour, and her

eyes had a curious deep sparkle in them.

Her pulses were beating with the pleasurable excitement of coming action. The time of waiting was at an end.

"Here it is—Mr. Andrew Haliburton, S.S.C., 35 York Place. I suppose you know where York Place is?"

"Oh, yes; I could walk through it blindfolded.

Thank you very much."

"I hope it is nothing to worry you. It is so hard for women to have to do with lawyers, so tiring and confusing. Lord Kilmartin was very kind to me at the time of my father's death, and secured as much for me as he could. I shall always gratefully remember that, for, of course, he need not, though he was my second cousin. Lots of people find it convenient to forget such relationships. But hadn't you better wait till Mr. Gilbert comes back—to-morrow, isn't it?"

"Yes; to-morrow night, unless he's detained. I'll just find out this before he comes back. Thank you

very much."

"And shall you be late?"

"I don't know; it depends. But you won't worry about me, Miss Fiddes. I can look after myself."

CHAPTER XXII

"ASK JEMIMA"

EMIMA BAIN had been out for her usual afternoon stroll in Princes Street. What Jemima did not know concerning the latest fashions as displayed in the shop windows was not worth knowing. Also she knew a good deal about the ladies who wore them in the fashionable promenade. Jemima could tell you more about the private affairs of Edinburgh society, especially the parts of it that were better left undiscussed, than any representative of the society press. Hers was an unpaid post, but she worked none the less hard on that account, and her compendium of information was amazing if not always accurate. She had a wonderful gift of intuition, of being able to piece two and two together, and her assumption was so cool that people accepted her information as true. "Ask Jemima" had passed into a proverb in the circles that had the privilege of her personal aquaintance. She had taken great pains to discover what had become of Lily Morison. She had even laid traps to discover the cabman who had driven her away, but in spite of the simplicity of the whole arrangement and the nearness of Lily's whereabouts, she had been completely baffled.

It was the open simplicity of everything that had been the runaway's best security. Nobody had thought of looking for her in the main road between Portobello and Joppa. So far as the Morisons were concerned, however, there had been no search. Lily had deli-

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berately turned her back on them. Very well, then, why move a finger to bring her back? Pride and dignity as well as common sense forbade it. Such was Morison's reasoning, and though his heart was inwardly sore, he showed no sign. Jean did not dare to mention her sister's name in the house. It had made a great difference, however, to her life. A pall seemed to fall over it, and the gloom of the long evenings was unrelieved. In her extremity, Jean went oftener to her aunt's house, and the only good issue of the family trouble had been the establishment of a better friendship between them. Of late Jean had avoided Jemima Bain, because they never met without that worthy advancing some new theory concerning Lily's disappearance.

On that March afternoon, after a long and careful study of the spring fashions as displayed in the shop windows and on the figures of the more dressy of the pedestrians, Jemima waited at the Register House for a Haymarket car. Three times had she paraded the length of Princes Street, and now was too tired to walk home. Jemima was very neat herself in a well-fitting black coat and skirt, and a flower toque perched on her abundant red hair. Gloves and shoes were beyond reproach. She had learned something of the art of dress from her prolonged studies of the fashions, and knew that the woman of small means does well to eschew bright colours and loud designs.

Her face was very pleasant, too, though by no means classical. There was always the suspicion of a smile in her bright eyes, and her good nature was imperturbable. Even snubs, of which she had received her full share in her insatiable hunt after news, seemed to have no perceptible effect. She was standing at the corner when she suddenly saw on the opposite pavement a figure which made her start, and began to tremble a little. Unless her eyes strangely deceived her, it was Lily

Morison.

A string of cars rolled up at the moment, her own

among the number, but she did not heed it. She made a dart across the street, escaping the traffic marvellously, and alighted on the other side breathless in her eagerness to find Lily. It was a very busy corner, and for the moment she missed her, and greatly feared she had taken some car that was already bearing her out of

But presently, casting her eyes westwards, she saw Lily, apparently making for the station steps. She flew after her, and without a moment's hesitation tapped her

on the shoulder.

"Lily, Lily Morison, as I'm a living woman!" she cried breathlessly. "A sight for sore eyes! Why, we all thought you had either gone under or gone abroad."

Lily was dismayed only for a moment. Having decided upon a certain course of action it could do no harm to speak a word to Jemima Bain, and to obtain from her some information regarding her own people.

"I'm all right," she said quietly, though coldly.

"How are you?"

"Oh, I'm always up to the mark. But I say, Lily, where have you been all this time? They've been nearly out of their minds about you at home."

"Have they? Then they needn't. I've been all

right."

"I must say you seem all right, but—"

Jemima was for the moment at her wits' end. It was evident that Lily had no intention whatever of satisfying her curiosity, and would probably disappear again as

mysteriously as before.

But at least it was a grand feather in her cap to be able to say she had seen her. Also it was a kind of fearful joy to be seen speaking to her, not knowing whether she had not already passed without the pale of recognition by respectable folks. But there was nothing about Lily's appearance to suggest the broad road; the dark, plum-coloured coat and skirt she wore and the neat toque set at the most becoming angle on her beautiful hair, bore the cachet of the West End if any clothes ever did. Such was Jemima's verdict. Not a single item or detail escaped her notice.

"Good-bye, Jemima, I'm in a hurry—going to the station. I'm glad they're all right at home. Tell them

I am too," said Lily, coolly. Jemima looked desperate.

"But, Lily, wait—don't go yet! Am I to tell them I've seen you? I won't tell if you don't want me to."

Lily smiled a little, and somehow at the smile Jemi-

ma reddened.

"I wouldn't like to lay such a burden on you, Jemi-

ma; tell them just what you like."

She longed to ask some questions regarding her own people, but her pride would not let her. Presently she would find other means to learn what she wished to know. At least there had been no catastrophe, else Jemima would have taken delight in presenting her with the details.

She gave a little nod, and turned away towards the station steps. Jemima followed her at a respectful distance, and, looking over the railings, saw her reach the booking office. By craning her neck she was able to observe that it was the office for Glasgow and the west she was at. When she had taken her ticket and passed along the platform Jemima followed her, still at a discreet distance, dodging the people to escape observation. Lily, however, knew perfectly well that she was being followed, and had laid her little plan accordingly. She did not propose that any authentic information regarding her movements should proceed from Jemima Bain.

The five o'clock train for Glasgow was getting steam up at the platform. Lily walked up to it, buying the "Evening News" on the way, and took her seat in a first class carriage, which Jemima did not fail to

note.

Two minutes later the train steamed out. But by the time Jemima had got up the long stairs and found her

car, Lily had left the train at the first stopping place, at

the Haymarket, and got into a cab.

Never had the car seemed so slow, or to be hindered by so many stoppages. But at last the Caledonian Station was passed, and it ran without stoppage to the Haymarket, where Jemima jumped out and almost ran up to Ardmillan Street. It was just a quarter past five. Jean would be certain to be in, and if not, it was her duty to seek an interview with Morison himself and acquaint him what she had seen. She tingled all over with pleasurable excitement, and already the process of embroidery of the facts had begun in her mind. That is the chief trouble where the inveterate newsmongers are concerned. Their information can seldom be accepted literally; imagination is too apt to run riot in the preparation of details which will give spice to their relation and importance to themselves.

Though the street door was open Jemima rang the Morison's bell, and by the time she reached the second floor Jean was waiting for her. Jemima observed that she had a white blouse on, indicating that somebody

must be there to tea.

"Oh, Jean!" she cried in a stage whisper, loud enough to penetrate anywhere, "I can hardly wait to

tell you—I've seen Lily——"

Jean coloured, and then grew pale again. She had no reason to doubt her word, but she wished it had not happened. Since the night of Lily's disappearance Jean had tried gradually to drop her neighbour, and seldom invited her into the house. She had disgusted her by her prying and her innuendoes concerning Lily's disappearance. But if this were true she must hear what has happened.

"Come in; we have a gentleman to tea. He's with father in the parlour, but we can go into the

kitchen."

Jemima nodded, and followed Jean into the kitchen, where she did not fail to observe the tray, with the best

china on it, and the silver service, with a clean hand-kerchief laid lightly over it to keep off the dust.

"I've just cleared away; excuse the confusion. Have

you really seen her, Jemima?"

"Why, yes. Do you think I'd make it up?" she asked in an injured voice. "I was standing at the 'Register' waiting for the car to come up from Leith when I suddenly saw her standing at the other side, on the Post Office steps, in fact, I ran across, and she was walking on to the station. I stopped her near the steps."

"What was she like and what did she say?" asked Jean painfully. Her expression was one which Jemima could never have understood even if it had been explained to her. Jean Morison now thought of Lily as of the lost; she wept over her in secret, and prayed such prayers as are heard in heaven, but she did not believe they would ever meet again in this world. She and Auntie Bell often talked about her, always in love and with falling tears. But for that Jean could not have supported the grey burden of her life. For her father seemed to grow more and more unsympathetic, and to shut himself more in upon himself. Also he had cut himself off as much as he could from the few outside things he had taken an interest in, and had resigned his post as deacon in St. Cuthbert's Church.

"She's quite the lady, Jean, I assure you, and not needing anything from anybody. She had on a gorgeous sort of plum-coloured frock with pearl embroidery on the sleeves, with sable furs and white gloves, and an ostrich feather in her toque that cost a pound if it cost a penny. She looked lovely, though——"

"Though what?" inquired Jean, almost in anguish.

"Although you—you could see that—that there was something wrong," said Jemima, leaving Jean in no doubt of her meaning. But she elected to pass by the suggestion in silence. She only suffered Jemima in the house because she was dying to hear about the sister of her love.

"I don't mind about her looks. Tell me what she

said. Did she tell you where she lived?"

"Oh, no, she was very high and mighty, as they always are," observed Jemima darkly. "But she was going to the station, and for your sake, Jean—only for your sake, mind-I followed a wee bittie off, and saw her take her ticket and get into the Glasgow train."

"The Glasgow train! Then she has gone west. Anyhow, I'm glad she's not out of Scotland. We'll see

"Ay, when she's needing help. That's what'll happen to poor Lily, high and mighty as she is now. But she's as bonnie as ever, Jean, upon my word she is. Everybody was looking at her. Of course that's not nice,

but I don't think they ever mind."

"What do you mean, Jemima, by 'they'? If you hint that my sister is not a respectable woman you can get out of this house. I don't care what has happened or what you may think, Lily is on the straight path; I could swear it. And I'll never forgive anybody that thinks or says different."

Jemima smiled, a superior smile.

"You've great faith, Jean," she said, as she prepared to go. "I sincerely hope it may be justified. Good-bye, here's me breaking my neck to get home to tell you, and that's all my thanks—a snub and the door! It's a horrid, ungrateful world. And as for neighbours, commend me to them for cheek, unadulterated cheek."

Jemima for once apparently had got seriously nettled. Jean was not disturbed thereby. She simply bade her

good afternoon and closed the door.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RETURN

ON alighting at the Haymarket Station Lily Morison took one of the waiting cabs, giving the man instructions to drive her to York Place. But she did not give him any number or address. She alighted when he stopped, paid him his fare, and then walked on to find the number which had been given to her by Miss Fiddes. She found it without difficulty, and the lawyer she came to consult was still in his office, and very willing to see her, though clients did not often call at that hour. She was closeted with him about half an hour, and when she came out her step was lighter, her face brighter than it had appeared at any time during the last week.

She crossed the street and retraced her steps back to the corner of Queen Street and Hanover Street. At the corner where her aunt's shop was situated there was a carriage waiting at the kerb. From the pavement as she passed by she could see the lady at the counter, her aunt behind it, and a pile of stuff between them. She took a walk up to George Street, and waited about until she saw the carriage drive away.

Then she walked down steadily and entered the shop by the usual door. Her aunt had already retired into the room behind, leaving the small girl to tidy up the contents of the numerous boxes that had been taken

down for the customer's benefit.

Lily passed the assistant by, and, opening the little

muslin-curtained glass door, passed in, taking care to close it again behind her. Miss Oliphant was engaged writing an important business letter, and looked round sharply. When she saw Lily she rose slowly to her feet, and stared without uttering a sound. It was a trying moment, but Lily was the first to recover herself. A little wavering smile crossed her face as she spoke.

"You don't look very pleased to see me, Auntie Bell.

I suppose I don't deserve it."

Now, the words angered Miss Oliphant, and though she was relieved to see her niece in the flesh once more, looking both well and well dressed, she thought it her duty to be very sharp with her. She had been behind the scenes a good deal at the Ardmillan Street flat since her flight, and knew what suffering had been caused by it. She would have liked a humbler attitude in the offender and author of that misery.

"Ye can't sit doon here, my woman," she said

calmly, "until things are cleared up a bit."

Her tone was unbendingly firm, but Lily did not

seem very perturbed.

"Of course, I know you have wondered, auntie, but I thought you at least would give me half a chance."
"Where have ye been?" inquired her aunt, without

the faintest sign of relaxation in her features.

"I've been living in my own home. Where else did you think I would be?"

"Are ye married, Lily Morison?"

"Then what's your name, and what's the meaning of this indecent conduct—yes, indecent, that's the word There's different ways of getting married. Surely ye chose the very worst."

"Maybe, but I am married right enough."

"When and where, and what's your name, and where's the man?"

"One at a time please, Auntie Bell," said Lily faintly.

"I was married last August, the tenth, when father and

Jean were away on their holidays at Selkirk."

Miss Oliphant stared, and made an effort to go back to the mentioned date. But she could recall nothing except a confused mass of business and other matters. The only thing she could bring out of the chaos was the fact that Lily had been left at home to clean the house that week, and had declined to come over to sleep at Hanover Street. And though she had wondered that the girl did not mind it, she had thought no more about

"The tenth of August? Where?"
"In a hotel. I am not at liberty to tell you that, auntie, nor my husband's name for a few more weeks."

"And where's the man?"

"He's about his business," she replied warily. "But, auntie, you may take my word for it. I'm married right enough, and you may hold up your head."

"Well, if it's true, you have been a cruel lassie to your father, and to Jean, and to me, that has mothered ye," said Miss Oliphant with a curious catch in her voice. She knew she ought to be angry, but her heart was melted at the sight of the child she had loved as her own, and she could have taken her to her heart.

"I couldn't help it, auntie. Some day I will tell you everything," said Lily in a low voice. "I know I did wrong, and, believe me, I have not been happy because of that. But when you hear everything you will under-

"Sit doon," said Miss Oliphant, pointing to a chair. "If only ye had sent a line to the old man. You'd be sorry for him; he's never held up his head since."

"He decided at once that I had gone to the bad?

What did Jean say or think?"

"Jean believes in ye, lassie, and I have tried to."

The simplicity of the words broke Lily down. She had been keeping a rein upon herself, but now she ran to her aunt and flung her arms about her neck and

sobbed on her breast as she had done in the long ago days, when childish sorrows oppressed her. The assistant closed the shop, and tapped at the door to inquire whether there were any messages. This interruption was timely, and served to restore some calmness in the little room behind. When she had gone, Miss Oliphant sat down in front of Lily, and fixing her eyes keenly on her sweet face, noted, as Jemima Bain had done, every detail of her dress and appearance, though in a different spirit. And she did not fail to observe that some refining influence had been at work, whether it was the cessation from active work or the happier life, but certainly there was a change.

"If you'll listen, auntie, I'll tell you all I can, but as I said, it won't be long before everything is known."

"The man!" said Miss Oliphant. "I suppose he's what they call a gentleman. It's only gentlemen," she added with a slight scorn, "that do this kind of thing. Decent working folk have better things to fill up their time with."

Lily nodded.

"Yes, he is a gentleman, and, of course, his people have been the trouble. He has only been earning a very little in his father's place of business, and if he had told him at the time might have been cut off."

"And if he would have been cut off then, what happens to him now?" asked Miss Oliphant. "It seems to me that unless there's been some sort of an earth-

quake it's the same first and last."

"Well, you see, he was waiting till he had a better position in the place, a legal position like he was entitled to, then he could do as he liked, and marry to please himself. That's the truth, auntie. I happen to know it, or I would never have waited with patience."

"I want to know what for ye ran away at all? What way couldn't ye have stayed in your father's house, keeping the secret as ye had done until ye could speak?

It would have saved a lot of bother."

Lily made no reply; she had none ready. She could hardly tell her aunt that the suggestion was hers—that she had insisted in order to force her husband's hand.

"And where are you staying, if I may ask that?"

Lily shook her head.

"That's just what I can't tell you yet, auntie, but you may believe me it's all right, and soon everybody will know."

Miss Oliphant shook her head and muttered to herself as she drew in a chair. When she sat down there was a moment's silence. Lily had taken off her gloves, and was turning her wedding ring round upon her, with an odd little smile on her lips.

"Jean knows by this time that I am not far away,"

she said.

"Have you been there, then?" asked her aunt with a start. "There's so much secret work that a body doesn't know where she is."

"No, but I met Jemima Bain at the Register

House."

"A chatterbox yon. I can't stand her. I'm glad she and Jean are not so intimate as they were. Did

ye speak to her?"

"Oh, yes, and she followed me down to the station, and saw me get into the Glasgow train, so you will hear from Jean to-morrow or the next time you see her that I'm in Glasgow."

"I suppose you got out at Haymarket?"

Lilly nodded, and began to draw on her gloves.

"You're not going yet? You'll stop a bit, and I'll send Ellen over for Jean."

Lily shook her head.

"I can't. I've got to go home now, but I hope you'll sleep the sounder to-night, and bring yourself to for-

give me before we meet again."

"If I ever see the man, lass, I'll give him a broadside. It'll do him good, gentleman or no gentleman. I could tell him gentle is that gentle does."

"You look very well yourself, Auntie Bell, not a bit

changed."

"What for should I be changed, and it's not that long since you saw me? I've enough work anyway to keep me out of mischief. I've a wedding order in to-night. If you had been at home, lass, your hands would have been full. Jean's not a worker like you."

"Whose wedding order?"

"You don't know her. It's Miss Inglis, the daughter of Lord Kilmartin. She's going to be married to one of the Hornes in the summer."

"Which one—two sons, are there not?"

"Yes. Oh, it's the second son, Gilbert by name. His folk are terrible pleased. Miss Biddy and she are very intimate. They're leaving for France the morn. Miss

Inglis had been ill and needing a change."

Absorbed in what she was saying, Miss Oliphant did not observe any change on her niece's face. But it did change, though almost imperceptibly. She was becoming an adept in masking her feelings, but her heart felt sick, and the room seemed to reel around her.

"Are you sure it's not the eldest son? He'd be more like Miss Inglis, wouldn't he, in age and every-

thing?"

"I'm dead certain—I know them all. Miss Inglis was here this afternoon leaving some orders, and her mother is to send the rest. I'll have to find somebody to undertake the work. I suppose it's not in your line now?"

"Oh, no. I hope I am done with that sort of thing—indeed, I am done with it," said Lily, with a curious

hardening in her voice.

She fastened her glove and stood up to go.

"Lassie, I've a good mind to lock the door and send for your father," said Miss Oliphant suddenly.

"Does he ever speak about me, auntie?" asked Lily, with a little tremor in her voice.

Miss Oliphant shook her head.

"Never in my hearing since you went away. Can I

tell him as much, then, as you have told me, or am I

under the ban yet?"

"Would it do any good, auntie? He wouldn't believe it. Better wait till I can make everything clear. But give dear Jean my love, and kiss her for me, and tell her I don't forget her, and that I never loved her as much when we were together as I have done since."

"I'll go over to Ardmillan Street, I think. If you'll wait I'll get my hat. There can be no objection, can there, to me walking up the street with you? Unless he happens to be waiting in the street or round the

corner."

"Oh, no; he's far enough away, and if he knew I was here now he wouldn't like it."

"It's a queer thing. If it be love it makes folk do queer things," said Miss Oliphant. "I'm glad this kind

at least never came in my way."

She felt almost hysterical, and could not understand her niece's unnatural calm. While in a sense relieved, she yet felt that the gulf had never been wider, nay, that it was now, and would remain, impassable.

"Good-night then, auntie, and good-bye for a few more weeks. I shan't come again until it's cleared up. It

can't be long now."

She moved towards the door, but her aunt reminded her that the shutters were up and the shop door closed. She showed her out to the side door.

"Good-night, auntie."

"Good-night. I don't know what to say or what to think, Lily Morison. I pray God that all may be as you

say:"

Lily did not answer. A bursting sob broke from her lips as she turned away from the closed door. Miss Oliphant returned to her sitting-room, and sat down to indulge in the unusual luxury of a good cry.

CHAPTER XXIV

A NEW ELEMENT

WHEN Jemima Bain bounced out of the house Jean Morison returned to the kitchen and stood there looking helplessly before her. Her one desire was to put on her hat and fly down to acquaint her aunt with what had happened. But the thought of the visitor in the next room deterred her. Although he had come to see her father—the third time in a fortnight—she did not feel justified in going out lest they should want some further attention. The gentleman was Grant Smeaton, the headmaster of the school where her father He was a comparatively young man, and though he had not in all the five years he had been at the head of the school entered Morison's house until now, the explanation was quite simple.

He had heard of the trouble that had come upon the old man, and dropped in one night to express his sympathy and to assure him that so far as he was concerned it would make no difference. For Morison, stung to the quick, and exaggerating, as a proud spirit would do, the attitude of the outside world towards one whom such disgrace had overtaken, had spoken darkly of resigning

and leaving the city that had used him so ill.

Smeaton heard these rumours, a big school being a little world where everything is discussed, and speedily becomes public property. He did not wish to lose Morison's services, which were valuable, and, further, he was naturally a kindly man, very willing to add his mite to help in any time of trouble.

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His first visit had been an immense surprise for Morison—in fact, he had not quite got over it vet. The school was the property of a small limited company, of which Smeaton was the managing director. It was a flourishing concern, and by reason of its long reputation as first class had not in any way suffered through the competition of secondary schools. Morison knew very well that should circumstances necessitate his leaving Heathmount his chances of a post of the same kind at his age would be small, but his pride was such that he had contemplated it, imagining the finger of scorn pointed, figuratively speaking, at him. Smeaton's visit had dispelled that immediate vision, and had cheered him, especially when it was followed by another on the following Sunday. This was the third visit made, on a Friday afternoon, when Morison had ventured to invite

On the three occasions Jean had done no more than remain in the room so long as her presence was necessary for the serving of such refreshments as they had to offer. This had been the invariable rule in the house on the few occasions when visitors were entertained. She was very glad that Smeaton had come, and she was surprised to find a man so clever, and with so many letters after his name, such a pleasant person, full of fun and stories, at which her father laughed in spite of himself. A new element had been introduced into the gloomy house, and, while thankful for it, Jean did not attempt any further analysis of the matter. That she could have anything to do with the visits of the headmaster did not occur to her; she did not even know whether he were married or single.

She had done her best anyhow to make him welcome, and had even at tea time that day been surprised into some expression of opinion on different subjects being directly appealed to by their guest. Her father had appeared surprised at Smeaton's attention and at Jean's response. He was relieved to hear that she could ex-

press herself on the subject of literature so well. He did not know she read books, or thought about them. As had been stated, he had no great opinion of women's abilities outside their own domain for which he believed that Providence intended them. That a man of Smeaton's parts should have anything to say to Jean struck him as very queer, but he felt glad that when she had

to speak she did not make a fool of herself. She had baked scones and cakes for the tea-party, glad to do what she could for her father's sake to make it a success; and when they were so heartily praised, and when Smeaton assured her that landladies studiously avoided the cultivation of such delightful household arts, she laughed, and answered him back with a touch of gay banter which amazed Morison, and made him fear Smeaton would think her forward. When the meal was over she cleared away as usual, in no way ashamed of what she had to do, since Smeaton, as her father's employer, knew exactly how they stood. She wondered casually as she stood there whether he would spend the whole evening, and whether she might venture to go down to George Street. While still standing she heard the parlour door open, and her father called her to come in.

She glanced in the little glass above the dresser, for she had been crying a little, and did not want to show it, but there was not much trace, so after hastily wiping her eyes she walked to the parlour door.

"Mr. Smeaton is very kind, Jean. He has two tickets in his pocket for the orchestral concert in the Music Hall, where Albani is to sing, and he would like to take you in an hour's time, so you'd better get ready."

Morison spoke in a curious voice, and Jean saw that he was deeply perplexed. She blushed a little herself, and then was angry, thinking it made her look foolish. Smeaton was standing on the hearthrug, with his hands folded behind his back, his pleasant face wearing quite an anxious look.

"It is indeed very kind," stammered Jean. "But—but I hardly know what to say. I never expected anything of the sort."

"Perhaps you don't care for concerts," suggested

Smeaton, with a disappointed note in his voice.

"Oh, don't I. I have never been in a really good one. It has been one of the dreams of my life. I should like to go very much, if father doesn't mind being left."

"Mind? Why should I? Thank Mr. Smeaton pro-

perly, and go and get ready," said Morison severely.

"I don't want any thanks; in fact, the favour is entirely on my side. I feel that I have presumed on a very slight acquaintance, which I hope Miss Morison will forgive. We will drive down. I made bold to order a cab to come at half-past seven, in the hope you'd come. It is beginning to rain, too, and your thin shoes might get damp."

It was his delicate way of letting Jean know that some dressing would be necessary, and she now understood why he was in evening dress, though it had surprised her very much when he arrived at five o'clock so

dressed.

She escaped out of the room, her heart beating a little faster, and went to her wardrobe to see what she could find. She had on an old black silk skirt that had been her mother's, and there was a black lace bodice which had done duty as evening dress for Lily and herself alternately on the few occasions when they required it. She did not take long to dress, and she was surprised to find how well she looked when quite ready to go down. A fine white silk shawl of Indian make, cleverly draped, did duty as an opera wrap, and Jean could not help smiling at her own image reflected back in the glass. The square of her throat and neck showed a dazzling white against the black lace, and the excitement of the hour had brought the colour high in her cheeks. She looked neither dull nor uninteresting,

her eyes sparkled, and she did not seem like the same woman. It is wonderful how a little appreciation can develop even a dull personality and bring out all sorts of unsuspected qualities. When she had hunted out a pair of white gloves, and fastened a small pink rose behind her left ear, she was ready to go down, by which time the cab had arrived at the street door.

They both looked at her when she entered, Smeaton with genuine admiration, and her father with a sort of

grim wonder.

"A woman can always deck herself, Mr. Smeaton," he said, with a slow, dry smile, behind which, however, lurked a secret pride that his girl did him no shame. "It seems to be born in them, and the quieter they

are the better they do it."

"And a jolly good thing for us, Morison," replied Smeaton with a boyish laugh. Then he made a bow to Jean. "I am very much obliged to you for doing me the honour. Shall we go now? I will bring her safely back, Mr. Morison, and smoke a pipe with you afterwards if you haven't got tired waiting and gone to bed."

So they left the house, Jean feeling as if she were treading on air. Her heart had been long starved; very little admiration or appreciation had come in her way, and that little had never been countenanced by her father, but this was very different. Smeaton was not only his superior in position, but by reason of his brilliant accomplishments he had made a place for himself in the most critical and exclusive city in the world.

Morison, whose respect for intellectual gifts amounted to a passion, even exaggerated those possessed by Smeaton, of whom he had often spoken to his daughters. That he should voluntarily seek to spend a whole evening in Jean's company staggered the old man, and as he sat down at his solitary hearth he pondered the thing over and over in his mind.

He had come there of a set purpose, apparently

dressed for the part, and had ordered the cab beforehand even on the chance that his request would be granted. What could it mean? Something more surely than the ordinary kindly desire to brighten

their lives in specially trying circumstances.

He was still pondering the mystery, to the accompaniment of a very strong pipe, when the door-bell rang. He looked annoyed, but he could hardly leave it unanswered, so, thrusting his feet into his carpet slippers—a new pair, he having burned those that Lily had sewed for him—he ambled out to the passage. When he opened the door he was partly relieved to see his sister-in-law.

"Evenin', Morison," she said briefly. "Jean in?"

"No, I am all alone. Maybe you'll not come in?"
He smiled grimly. Miss Oliphant responded by entering and shutting the door.

"It doesn't matter-maybe as well, but where is

she?"

"Did you not meet a cab? She's away to a concert in the Music Hall."

"Albani's concert?" asked Miss Oliphant, who was also a music lover and occasionally went to these concerts.

"I think so. A gentleman has taken her—no less a

person than Mr. Smeaton."

"Your Smeaton?" inquired Miss Oliphant as she unwound the heavy scarf of black silk lace from her throat and untied the strings of her mushroom hat.

He nodded.

"Surely that's the ninth—or isn't it the sixteenth?—wonder of the world; but I'm glad the lass is getting a little diversion, Morison. It's not before time. Well, I've seen Lily."

Morison gave a great start and spoke no word, but the hand which fell on the folds of the evening paper began

to tremble.

"Seen Lily!" she repeated as she laid down her

scarf and gloves and smoothed them on the table. "She's been at my house, and she looks uncommonly well."

"I don't want to hear anything about her," he said

harshly. "She's disgraced me."

"You'll have to hear, my man, whether you will or no," she replied calmly. "The lassie says everything's right, and that in a very short time she'll be able to prove it to your satisfaction. Poor thing, what d'ye think she said, Morison?"

He shook his head.

"She said 'I suppose he'—meaning you—'never gave me a chance, but thought I'd gone to the bad at once.' That sounds as if ye had fallen short of your duty. If the Almighty judged as hard and swift, where would any of us be—tell me that?"

Morison's mouth twitched. He was dying to put a thousand questions, but the old Adam of pride within

would not suffer it.

"Man, Morison, I can see through and through you as if you were glass," observed his sister-in-law with the large compassion she might have displayed towards a foolish child. "Sit down and I'll tell you every single thing about the bairn. It's been a trial to you, my man, that I know, but you forget that there might be other folk with feelings as well."

She drew in her chair and sat down opposite to him, her comely face all aglow with the kindly womanly impulses of her heart. And as she talked the lines began to relax on Morison's stern face. By the time she had

finished he was weeping.

CHAPTER XXV

THE CONTRITE HEART

MISS OLIPHANT did not wait the return of the concert-goers. She left soon after nine, after a better hour with her brother-in-law than she had ever spent in her life.

"What are we but bairns, Morison, when it comes to the big things of life?" she asked him as she stood a moment at the door. "If we could but trust a bit more

than we do things would be easier for us."

"That's true, my woman," said Morison with a soft note in his harsh voice. "It's easier for a woman than a man. I often said that to your sister when she was

alive. I've a dour temper keeping me back."

It was a great admission for Morison. She gave his hand a warm grip and bade God bless him, and as she went downstairs she repeated under her breath, "Nothing but bairns, and stupid bairns at that. It's a

wonder He puts up with us as He does."

Morison went back strangely comforted to his lonely fireside. Somehow the clouds seemed to have parted a little, and for the first time in all these dreary weeks he permitted himself to think of the daughter he had lost. He went far back to the long ago days when she had been a toddling bairn at her mother's knee, and he owned with a sigh that these had been his best days, too, when youth was at the prow, and the corroding rust of the world had not eaten in upon his heart.

Upon this tender mood the pair from the outside

world broke like a fresh breath of wind. He had to let them in, and he heard their voices before he opened the door, Jean's shrill and sweet, as if her feelings overflowed.

"Oh, father, I have enjoyed myself," she cried, with all the spontaneous joy of a child. "I'll never forget it

as long as I live."

He smiled a little as he followed them into the parlour. Her looks, so radiant, so awakened, amazed him. He asked himself whether she could be the same dull Jean who was part of the grey web of daily things. Her sparkling eyes, her speaking expression, her fine colour, the air of abandon and pure enjoyment seemed to have made her a new woman.

"This excitement, I doubt, can't be very good, lass,"

he said doubtfully.

"Am I excited, Mr. Smeaton? I am sure I have behaved myself well, and tried to show an intelligent appreciation of the music. What a treat it was!"

Smeaton smiled too, but his eyes were grave.

"I have seen things through new eyes to-night, Mr. Morison, and I am filled with shame thinking of the many opportunities I have lost."

It was a speech that required some elucidation, but

nobody asked for it.

"Won't you sit down and I'll get a cup of coffee?" she asked with an almost wistful look, as if she feared her new friend would disappear.

"I shall be only too glad if Mr. Morison will allow

me. He promised me a last smoke, I remember."

"Oh, no, he didn't; it was you who said you would take it," cried Jean saucily, and she gathered up her

wraps and ran away.

"She seems to have had the time of her life," said Morison thoughtfully. "Maybe I haven't taken them out enough. A widower, Mr. Smeaton, must make mistakes with his children. It's not in the nature of things that it can be otherwise."

"What a reserve of power there is in her, Morison. I can tell you, I've never had such a companion, and I am greatly obliged to you for allowing me the privilege."

Morison did not answer, but his face did not lose the curious expression which Miss Oliphant's talk had brought there. When Jean came in with the supper tray she observed that he was very quiet. She came without fuss, having tied a white housewife's apron over her gala frock, and with a word of laughing apology for the incongruity. She had the look and the manner of a woman who does not fear criticism; who knows it will be friendly.

She had forgotten for the moment that she had still to tell her father the item of news conveyed to her by Jemima Bain earlier in the evening. They drank their coffee together, and Jean then bade Smeaton good night.

It was near midnight, and she had had a long day. Besides, she understood that her father and his guest had still their pipes and their talk to share together. She put away the things they had used, and then went to her own room, but she was in no hurry to prepare for bed. Indeed, she felt that she could stay up all night. She could hear the low tones of their voices coming up from below, and the sense of Smeaton's presence in the house seemed to fill it with a surprising comfort. Her thoughts were a wonderful medley, but certainly above all there was an inward thankfulness that such a friend had been raised up to lighten the gloom of their existence. In his company and presence her father was a different man, a more human man, with whom it was possible to deal.

She put away the finery bit by bit, reluctantly going over in memory every moment of that unforgettable evening; the joy of sitting in the stalls, part of a well-dressed crowd; conscious that in the eyes of her companion at least she was desirable and fit. Many had recognised him, and glanced with evident curiosity at her.

Meanwhile, had she dreamed of what was the subject

of talk below, her cup would have been filled.

When she had said good night, and Smeaton held open the parlour door for her, he did not resume his seat, but stood by the fireplace, looking down for a few seconds contemplatively and in silence at the fire.

"Won't you sit down again, Mr. Smeaton? It's not

that late, and to-morrow's Saturday."

"I won't sit, Morison, but I am not going just yet. I want to ask you something."

"Yes, what is it?"

"I am tremendously impressed with your daughter—in fact, I may say no woman has ever impressed me so much, and I have met many. I thought I was not a marrying man—I'm thirty-seven now—and in the last ten days or so have felt discontented for the first time with my bachelor condition."

Morison never spoke.

"Have I your permission to—to come to the house on these terms—to take my chance, I mean? I'll win

her for my wife if I can."

Morison got up. His big figure seemed to acquire a sudden dignity, though he looked a little bewildered at the honest face of the man before him. He was a gentleman, every inch of him. His easy attitude, his self-reliant manner proclaimed it, yet there could be no doubt about the meaning of his words.

"Are you asking me to-to-I mean, you would

think of my daughter like that?"

"I made my meaning clear, I thought. If you've no objections, Morison, I'll take my chance with her. You know exactly what my position and standing are, so that my credentials, as it were, are beforehanded. I've saved a good bit of money, and I can set my wife up from the beginning as I would like to see her. I admire her—she's a real woman—and her abilities have never had a chance."

The words were out before he could help them, and Morison bowed his head almost humbly.

"I can't believe my ears," he said at last in a slow, different voice. "After what has happened to her sister, too. I took it very kindly indeed that you came to see us, but this—"

"You've no personal objections, I hope? If you have I must do my best to dispel them," said Smeaton as if he did not like the trend of Morison's speech.

"What objection could I have if you are satisfied? My daughter has not the right to look so high, especi-

ally after what has happened to her sister."

"What difference does that make to her? We spoke of it to-night as we drove home, and I think she understands what I feel about it. Have I your leave then to—to court her? I suppose that's the word. Upon my word, this is my first experience of the kind, for I have never been a ladies' man. If you give me leave I'll come back on Sunday afternoon and take her out for a walk."

Morison said nothing, but his shoulders heaved. Smeaton, a man of discernment and fine feeling himself, understood and turned to go. He felt that it would be best. It was a curious parting. There was no other word said, but the grip of the hand at the door spoke volumes. Jean, holding her breath upstairs, heard the shutting and the locking of the door, and the next moment her father's voice called her at the bottom of the stair.

"Are you in bed, Jean?"

"No, father."

"Then come down. I want to speak to you."

She threw on her dressing-gown and ran down, still a little breathless, with her eyes sparkling and her cheeks glowing. She was quite conscious of the intentness of her father's look as she entered the parlour.

"It's late, but there's two things to speak of, my woman," he said with a curious gentleness. "Your aunt has been here this evening, and she has seen Lily. She was at her house this evening about six o'clock."

"Yes, father, I am not surprised, because I heard from Jemima Bain that she had seen her in Princes Street."

"Your aunt is perfectly satisfied that things are not so bad as we feared," he continued in an even voice, not appearing to be annoyed by the mention of Jemima Bain's name. "She says that Lily is married, and that very soon now she will be able to explain everything."

Jean clasped her nervous hands together in a little

rush of thankfulness.

"She always behaved—Lily, I mean—as if everything was right, and begged me to have patience with her," she answered, "and lately I have thought we might have trusted her a little more, or made some effort to find her. Sometimes I have not been able to sleep for thinking that we had cast her off."

It was the first time she had ventured upon an expression of her own opinion, but even that her father did

not seem to resent.

"It was an awful thing to happen in this house, Jean," he said in a low voice. "It seemed to shake and destroy everything, and I have not been the same man since. But maybe, as you say, we should have waited. Your aunt is of that mind, too. God forgive me if I have been too hard on my own bairn."

Jean made a little breathless movement, unable to believe her own ears. While the new tone and look relieved her, they were not without their pang, too. There was something pathetic and almost unbearable in the new humiliation of her father, and she even wondered whether he was going to be ill, perhaps to die. She could not otherwise account for this strange upheaval in a nature so still and proud.

"We can only wait now as she has bidden us," he said quietly. "And if all be right as she says, then I will bless God and try to serve Him with the remnant of my life better than I have done. I'll be like a man stayed from execution. And now the other thing, more

wonderful than this even, and it concerns you. Can you guess what it is?"

Jean shook her head, but the slight colour rising in

her cheek belied her words.

"It is easily said, and it is a pleasant word," he went on, regarding her with a curious, searching, tender look. "It is for you he has been here to-night—for you he is coming again. And he has asked me whether I will let him come on these grounds. Grant Smeaton would marry you, Jean, if you could bring your mind to it."

"Oh! father," she said with a little gasp. "It is im-

possible!"

"So I would have said myself, because you know what he is and what his position is in Edinburgh," he went on patiently. "If I were to search the whole of Edinburgh through, there is not a man I would have chosen before him. Look you, Jean, I have been under him for five years, and it is to his subordinates that a man shows his true self. And though I say it, he is a king."

"Oh, I know. He talked about Lily to me to-night,

father, and he feels for her as a woman might."

"It is a wonderful thing, I say. What we—or at least I—have thought as a dire disgrace, for which a man might keep down his head for ever, he speaks of as one of the natural affairs of life. And he asks what difference it makes to you. He has taught me a lesson, Jean. I will not interfere, because it is none of my business, and it is you who would have to live with the man. He is coming again on Sunday. In between you can think it over, and—and let him know."

Jean drew her dressing-gown about her and turned

to go.

"You can see the manner of man he is that he spoke to me first. I'm not saying it is my due, but it shows what he is, I say. Your sister has wrung my heart, Jean. You could heal it, but I leave it to you; and whatever you decide I will say God bless you, for you are a sensible woman, and have never failed in your

duty nor spoken an ill word in this house."

He drew near to her, and with an effort, which shows how rare was the occasion, stooped down and kissed her forehead. Then Jean ran from the room with a quick breath, and shutting herself in her room, fell upon her knees to try and realise this wonderful thing that had come into her life.

It was none of her seeking, but under its magic touch her whole nature seemed to expand and blossom like the rose. She was too happy to sleep.

Left to himself, Morison closed the door. His face wore a dreamy look as of a man scarcely yet awakened

to the reality of things.

He took a turn or two across the room, and after a brief hesitation before the closed doors of the bookcase, opened it and took down a Bible. It was a small old book in worn morocco covers, well handled without and within, for it had been the constant companion of a dead woman's life.

Many passages were marked and marked again where special comfort had been sought and found. Before one, against which lay the ribbon marker, which had been one of Lily's first efforts of fancy work, he paused. They were familiar words, but this night he read them in the

light of a new meaning and commentary.

Still grasping his book, he slid down to his knees, he who had never really bent the knee in his life. Form of prayer had never lacked in that house, but the real sacrament of the contrite heart was now offered for the first time. Sorrow had hardened and embittered joy, and the uplifting of a crushed life now broke his heart, and it lay an acceptable offering before the God who had borne with his hardness so long. Morison prayed.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DAY DREAM

IT was a spring evening, and Elsie Gerard, taking a stroll round her little garden, was delighted to find a clump of primroses under the hedge, and the spikes of a yellow crocus making bold to unfold. She stooped down to make sure that there was no mistake, but was disturbed by a step on the gravel, and swiftly turned her head. She smiled when she saw Mr. Horne enter. and advanced to meet him with outstretched hand. To Elsie Gerard the master of Burton Lea represented not only the best friend she had ever had, but a whole new era in her life. Sometimes she told herself that they owed him everything. Humphrey, happy in his work, making strides in advancement every day; their dear little home in the country but ten minutes' walk from the gates of Burton Lea; her mother's partial restoration—all that was good and precious she attributed to him. And she was wont to watch his face, her own heart sinking when she saw it grave, her eyes brightening when he smiled. To Horne this sympathy, so ready and spontaneous, the quick overflowing gratitude were more sweet than he knew. He had begun to lean upon it too much, only as yet he had not admitted it to himself. There were very few days indeed when he did not see Elsie Gerard, either at the Cleugh Cottage, as it was called, or at Burton Lea. Now that Biddy had gone abroad for a month, she did not go there, but it made no difference. Within one short week Horne had got into the habit of calling at the Cleugh every evening on

his way back from Bonnygate.

"I have found some flowers," she said. "And here they are. I can spare you them for a buttonhole, and, as you are dining out to-night, will you promise to wear them?"

"Depend upon it I'll wear them, though it is unusual," he replied. "It is a fine evening for the season,

but we'll pay for it yet."

"Oh, don't say that," she cried quickly. "I am always trying to enjoy everything without thinking of the price. Must there always be a price?"

"I have proved it so, but I have no right to sadden

you. How is your mother to-day?"

She drew a little quick breath.

"Mother has gone into town to Trinity to see Mrs. Grahame. They used to know one another in India, you know, and one day last week she came here to see mother, and asked her to spend the afternoon. She did not ask me, and I let mother go alone."

"You thought it quite wise?" he asked gently.

She nodded.

"I think so; I hope so. You see, it is better to trust her a little. Don't you remember that last time we talked about it you thought so too?"

"Yes, I remember, and how will she get back?"

"They will fetch her. I have been writing to Biddy this afternoon. Do you know what I was thinking just before you came up, and when I found the little flowers?"

"I could not guess."

"I was thinking it was the first time I had watched for the real spring, and seen it come. It is lovely to be here. Believe me, I thank God for it every day."

He was for the moment too deeply moved to speak. "It does not take much to make you happy, to provoke your gratitude," he said quickly. "You have often put me to shame."

"Oh, no, don't say that. You understand, we have had this nightmare so long, and to escape from it, even if it should only be for a time, is a great thing. We owe it to you. I shall never forget that, and Humphrey will never forget it. I am sure you will find that."

"Bonnygate is a different place now, I assure you, and if they do return me to Parliament after Easter, I

shall be able to go to London with an easy mind."

"You will have to live mostly in London?" she asked, and there was a partly wistful expression on her sweet face.

"Wholly while Parliament sits, of course. That is the part of it I shall not enjoy. I like my own home, and have none of the attributes of a Club man."

"None of us will like it," she said quickly. "If it were not so wicked I might say that I hoped you would not be elected."

They both laughed, then she asked if he were not

coming in.

"Not to-night. I really looked in to tell you that Humphrey would be late to-night, as he is attending a meeting for me. I must go on as I am dining in town."

She walked with him to the gate, and after he was outside it, and the barrier between them, he seemed to

linger.

"Elsie, I am very uneasy in my mind about Gilbert, very uneasy indeed. There is something the matter with the lad. I wish to God I could find out what it is."

Elsie looked grave, but not surprised.

"I have thought that myself for some time, and, Mr. Horne, last time I saw Miss Inglis she was unhappy too. Do you think they are suited to one another?"

"It isn't that. Gilbert's hiding something, and Mary suspects it. I don't believe myself that the

marriage will ever take place."

"It would be far better for it not to take place than that they should be unhappy."

"I suppose so. Yes, of course it would; but the Inglises are keen on it since the partnership was arranged, and he couldn't well withdraw now. I feel bad about it. I think we're in for some trouble where Gilbert is concerned."

"Don't let it trouble you too much. If there has really been any disagreement between them, Biddy will

find it out."

"I daresay. Biddy told me herself the night before they left that Mary was very lukewarm about the marriage preparations when they came to be spoken about. What did Humphrey think of the atmosphere that night he went along to Moray Place with Walter to say good-bye?"

Elsie hesitated a moment, leaning her arms on the low bar of the gate. The soft spring wind ruffled the hair on her forehead, and her colour was fresh and

sweet like the rose.

"Humphrey admires her very much, Mr. Horne. I don't think I ought to tell you, but—but he told me that night it was well for him she was going away, and that he hoped she and Gilbert would be married soon."

Horne gave vent to a low whistle.

"Did Humphrey say that?"

"Well, I surprised him into it. We went for a walk over the Cleugh after he came in that night, and I thought he was frightfully dull. But you won't speak of it to any one, will you?"

"Certainly not. Well, she might have done worse. Gilbert is my own son, but if I were a woman, I know

which I should prefer."

"You are too kind to us, Mr. Horne. Good night.

Don't forget the flowers. I shall ask you to-morrow whether you wore them. Who knows, perhaps you will set the fashion."

She laughed as she spoke, a clear, low laugh, which

indicated a heart at rest.

The sound haunted Horne as he turned back along

the road to his own gate, and he gave an involuntary sigh.

Then he drew himself up sharply, and stood still on

the roadway.

"A fool of yourself at your time of life, about a little girl like that, your own daughter's friend. She's for one of your boys, never for you. The sooner you get some more work to do the better it'll be for you, old boy."

About half an hour later, and before it was dark, Walter came along the road on his way home from the University, where he was already attending classes.

Elsie was still in the garden, and Walter stopped to speak to her, and when she asked him to come in and drink a cup of tea he did not refuse. Elsie took the liveliest interest in every member of the Burton Lea household, and watching their comings and goings was

an endless occupation for her.

"I may as well confess I lay in ambush for you, Walter," she said frankly as she set him in the cosiest chair, and began to wait on him daintily. The intimacy between the Cleugh Cottage and Burton Lea had made gigantic strides in a few weeks' time, and they often wondered how they had existed before the arrangement had been made.

"Your father has just been here, but he wouldn't come in. How are you getting on, Walter? Are you

being a good boy and working hard?"

"I am. Don't I show signs of it?" he asked with

mock indignation.

"Well, perhaps; and I know how late you sit at nights, for Biddy told me. But that is bad for you. It never pays to burn the candle at both ends. Your father is horribly worried about Gilbert. Do you think there's anything wrong?"

Walter looked bewildered, and Elsie immediately realised that it was quite hopeless to speak to him

about it.

"Wrong? What could possibly be wrong? He's got everything he wants in this world now, I should think. The only difficulty is to choose the house. I heard they couldn't find one to their minds, or that Miss Inglis was not well enough to trouble about it before she left. Isn't he doing well at the works now?"

"I don't know, but I thought your father was worried, that's all, and I hate to see him worried. He

ought never to be worried."

She spoke with a frank warmth which considerably

surprised Walter, and made him regard her intently.

"I'm sorry he's worried, but he'll be all right when Gilbert gets married. It can't be long now. There was a letter from Biddy this morning. Did father tell you?"

"No."

"She's enjoying herself all right, but we miss her in the house. I am working hard, Elsie. May I call you Elsie? All the others do.".

"Yes, why not? I am Elsie. But why do you assure

me you are working? Do you think I doubted it?"

"Oh, no, but I like you to know. But I wish-I

wish I could get some of these lost years back."

"Don't say lost. Nothing is ever quite lost, Walter, believe that," she said with a quiet and lovely look. "I can say that even now, when I am thinking about my father. Often I want him here, how badly you can't think, but unless he had been taken we never should have been here, and mother would not be as she is."

"She has been very well of late. I was noticing the difference on Sunday. She looks so much younger."

"She's entirely different, and she loves this place, and the garden, and the Cleugh. Oh, it is making her all right," said Elsie quickly. "I was trying to tell your father how I felt about it, only he will never listen. How we shall miss him when he goes away to London"

"Oh, after the election. But then it is only for a time, and I expect he'll be running up for lots of week-

ends. So you don't think the years lost? But it's harder for me, and my brain works more slowly than I expected."

"Oh, you'll get on fast enough, Walter," she said

cheerfully. "Don't pull a long face like that."

"Five years I've got to hammer away, and after that perhaps another five before I earn anything."

"Why, Walter, I am surprised at you! I thought

you despised money."

"I thought I did myself. It was only last Sunday I began to go into the thing, and to think with a kind of dismay about the time it was going to take, and I am twenty-seven now."

"You don't look it; and never mind, when you are qualified you will only be thirty-two. Nobody wants a young doctor. If you can get a few grey hairs so much

the better for you."

"How old are you, Elsie?"

"I am twenty-four."

"Twenty-four! You don't look it either. I should

have said eighteen."

"That's because you can't see the wrinkles through your spectacles. How important and learned they make you look! Does it ever strike you as being a strange and unbelievable thing that two months ago we did not know each other, any of us, except Biddy?"

Walter laughed.

"It certainly seems impossible. Perhaps we knew

each other in some former state."

"Oh, no. It's—it's the right kind of people, you see; the people who ought to be friends; time and distance and everything else are powerless before them. I was trying to explain it to your father one day, but he was very dense, wilfully so, as I told him, just to get me plunged into inextricable depths."

"You and the old man get on very well."

"We do, and pray don't call him 'the old man'; it's disrespectful, and, besides, he is the youngest among

you," she said severely. "Your father is a splendid man, Walter; the best I have ever known, or ever expect to know in this world."

"Yet he is sometimes called hard," hazarded Walter.

"Send them to me," she said grimly. "Do you know that mother has gone to Trinity to-day by herself? I didn't tell Humphrey this morning, and I hope she will come back before him."

"I hope so, too, if you wish it."

"How very good you are to-night, very apologetic, too. I am afraid you have been doing something you ought not to have done, eh, Walter?"

"That is quite true. I have been idling my time.

but I will do penance."

"How have you idled it?"

"That is precisely what I can't tell you."

"But why? I shall keep you here until you do."

"Will you?" He took up his hat and began to move towards the door. "I'll tell you something if you like. It is a pity the Cleugh was not on the other side of the gates instead of on this. It's a pitfall and a lure, Elsie, nothing else."

"Walter Horne!"

"Quite true. I said that to dad one day, and he

laughed and agreed with me."

"Then we must move on," she said with a sudden rueful shrug of the shoulders. "It is the doom and the fate of the Gerards to be perpetually moving on."

"I don't think that will happen. Did you know that

dad had bought the whole of the Cleugh?" She looked at him with wondering eyes.

"No: has he? I wonder why he did not tell me?"

"Well, he heard that it might be bought and built on; he outbid them, and that's the fact. He didn't want new villas opposite the gates, and we all wanted to keep you here."

She followed him out to the door and the gate in

silence.

"Go home and work, Walter, and don't let me hear any more about the lost years," she said.

When he left her she went back to her flower border to count the blanks that had been made by the picking

of the little posy.

But her thoughts were not wholly with the gifted flowers. She seemed to forget where she was; a sort of day dream had her in a thrall. Some sudden awakening thought surely was hers, for the colour suddenly rose high and red in her cheek. She rose hastily to her feet as if ashamed and rubbed her face with her hands. But nobody ever knew what was that tell-tale thought.

CHAPTER XXVII

GILBERT'S JEALOUSY

HUMPHREY GERARD put up his test tubes and carefully replaced his microscope in its velvet-lined case. The light was fading from the big window of the laboratory, which commanded a magnificent view of the whole valley of the Water of Leith. His face wore the absorbed expression of one whose interest in his work is of the deepest and most perfect kind.

Naturally a methodical and tidy person, he proceeded to put everything with which he had been working into their proper places, locked the cupboard, and rubbed the

great table clean from end to end.

His brows were knit a little, as if the mind were still hard at work solving some deep problem. Life was very satisfying to Gerard at the moment. His was the joy of beholding not one, but many worlds to conquer in the same great realm of science. He seemed to know no weariness. Many a morning he was at the gates with the earliest mechanic, and his evenings were spent at the classes at the Heriot Watt College, or in poring over chemistry books at home. But while undoubtedly giving his whole mind and attention to the immediate subject in which he wished to excel, he took an intelligent and hearty interest in the whole fabric to which he had suddenly been introduced. It was his first acquaintance with the miniature world of a great industrial concern, and it interested him beyond all telling. He was a born leader of men. Though reared in a very different school,

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he seemed by natural intuition to arrive at some true understanding of the working man, and he had from the first an influence over them.

Quiet, and not particularly responsive to people of his own station, he had a frank, hearty manner towards his fellow-workmen, as he called them, which had quickly disarmed any prejudice existing at the time of his entrance. There is always a certain amount of jealousy in such cases, and the criticism is at once complete and scathing. Gerard, however, avoided any pose, he came frankly among them as an ignorant person anxious to learn, and he did not forget his employer's hint that he was to take his cue from Bannerman.

Bannerman had served at the Bonnygate Works for over thirty years, and had been in the employment of old Walter Horne when the business was started first. He was able within limits, but lacked the initiative which perhaps only education and training can give. He was getting to be an old man now and had seen many changes in the methods of the business, as well as immense strides in scientific research. He had done his best to keep abreast of the times, chiefly because of his intense personal devotion to his employer's interest. But now he was beginning to feel his powers failing, and it was a genuine joy to the old man to find in Humphrey Gerard a young man not above taking a hint from an old one, and, moreover, one to whom he could speak freely, certain of not being misunderstood.

Bannerman had a very poor opinion of his master's sons. Walter he characterised as being "no' that ill," but he had never discovered any common meeting ground between himself and Gilbert, who had persistently and loftify ignored him during his term in the laboratory. This had made the old man feel very sore, and his last years indeed had been made uncomfortable by the daily thorns in his lot placed there by the hand of Gilbert

Now that Gilbert was removed to the counting-house

he came in contact with him but seldom, consequently Bannerman had taken a new lease of life, and become once more the talkative, genial old man it was his nature to be.

He came in presently from his own domain without knocking, which had been a constant source of irritation to Gilbert, and had made many sharp passages between them. Bannerman was not a Socialist nor a Democrat, but he gave honour where honour was due, and he had none to bestow on Gilbert Horne. The mere fact that he was his master's son did not alter his estimation of him as a useless waster. His contempt for his ability was profound, though he had tried not to express it too freely for his master's sake. Gerard had impressed him differently; from the first they seemed to understand one another.

"The day is creepin' oot," he observed. "Look at

this, man, afore ye gang."

He held a phial in his hand containing a dark-coloured liquid, concerning which they conversed for a few moments in low tones of deep interest. It was an aniline dye which Bannerman was deeply interested in, and upon which he had been making experiments no less interesting to Gerard.

"I believe I've got it, but no' a cheep to the maister or the morn. I'll tak' it hame, and we'll see. There's Maister Gilbert awa' hame. A quarter past six! When his faither was like him he was sittin' here, ay, often, or nine, an' giein' his mind to his business. It's no' like

faither like son."

Gerard glanced out of the window, and at the moment Gilbert, seeming to have forgotten something, turned back. Bannerman, observing his coming in the direction of the laboratory, made himself scarce. Gerard was washing his hands when Gilbert entered. They did not get on well; some antagonism in their natures always rose to the surface when they met.

The momentary softening of the heart drawn forth

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by his father's generous provision for him had passed, leaving Gilbert evidently in harder mood than ever. His face had lines upon it, to which youth ought to be a stranger, and his habitual expression of late had been one of gloom. His nerves were getting out of order, too; he would start when unexpectedly disturbed, as if he feared some Nemesis on his track. He had indeed proved the way of transgressors to be hard. The frightful tangle into which he had brought his private affairs was certainly enough to have driven a stronger man to despair. Gerard looked up and bade him good evening. Gilbert did not respond. He tried the drawers in the great table which stood between the long windows, and finding them locked turned to Gerard with a scowl.

"Where are the keys?" he asked surlily.

Gerard took them from his pocket and laid them down without a word.

"Why are they in your pocket? Do you take them home?"

"Sometimes."

"Then don't. It's against the rules, and will get you into trouble with the master. Did you touch a small bundle of papers that was here in the bottom drawer, labelled and docketed?"

"No; they are there still, at the very bottom."

"You know precisely where to find everything. I suppose you have made yourself master of their contents?"

Gerard bit his lip, and his colour rose. His temper, though not passionate, was quick enough, and the sug-

gestion made was a studied insult.

"My father has made a mistake, I think, giving everything into your hands as he has done. It is unprecedented with a new servant. He has to be tested first."

"Your father presumably knows his own business best," replied Gerard curtly. He had never seen Gilbert in such a nasty mood, but, though nettled, he was determined not to lose his temper.

"Be good enough to leave the keys with the care-

taker or on the counting-house desk after this."

"I have Mr. Horne's permission to work late," replied Gerard civilly but firmly. "And he is perfectly well aware that I take the keys home."

"It's against the rule. When I was here my father was keen enough about every little punctilio being observed. It is better that a new servant should conform

to the rules."

Gerard suddenly smiled. He could not help it, though why he did so at the moment he could not say. Gilbert's iteration of the word "servant," obviously meant to annoy him, fell short of its mark. The smile added the necessary spark to the flame of Gilbert's inward wrath, and it blazed forth.

"Don't grin so insultingly at me! Who do you think you are, anyhow? A confounded whippersnapper of a law clerk my father picked out of the gutter and brought here as a spy. He'll get all his

thanks in one day, and I've told him so."

Gerard turned his back on his assailant, entered the small dressing-room, which opened off the laboratory, and banged the door. He did not want to bandy words with Gilbert, and, above all, not to lose his temper. Retreat was the only alternative. He heard Gilbert muttering to himself for a second or so, then he went out, and also banged his door. Thus was war declared.

Bannerman came in by-and-bye ready to go home.

When Gerard heard him he came out.

"Mr. Gilbert's on the warpath, Charlie," he said lightly, though his colour was still a little heightened and his eyes unusually bright. "He's had his fling at me."

"He lookit mad when he cam' oot. It's black-he'rted

jealousy, that's a'."

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"I believe you. I am sorry though, because it will

.

make a difference to me. I do my best to conciliate

him. Do you think I-I assume too much?"

"No; I think you're the right man in the right place at last, an' I telt the maister that this very day. He thinks that himsel'."

"Thank you, Bannerman."

"An', what's mair, he has an easier mind than I've kent him ha'e since his sons cam' here. But if he gangs awa' to Parliament things will be geyan queer here, I can tell ye. I think I'll be seekin' my pension sune."

"No, no, Charlie, you must stand by me."

"We'll see." Bannerman lowered his voice, and, glancing round cautiously to see whether anybody could possibly be in hearing, he approached Gerard

with a mysterious look on his face.

"He's got something on his mind, Maister Gerard, something that's gaunna get him intil trouble. I maun tell ye. It's been on my mind for a hale week. I was very near tellin' the maister himsel' this mornin', but he has had trouble enough. Maybe ye could advise what should be done."

"What is it, Charlie? But unless you think I could be of any use I should prefer not to hear anything that would prejudice me against Mr. Gilbert. I need rather to have my cause bolstered up where he is concerned."

"Oh, he canna hurt you; you're abune him," observed Bannerman, as if his verdict settled the whole

matter. "See, let me tell ye I've twa dochters."

"So ye told me."

"Ane o' them's in a shop in Princes Street, the ither ane—Annie—is in service. She changed her place a fortnicht ago, and has gane to Portobello, where she's housemaid at a manse."

"Yes," said Gerard, when Bannerman seemed to

pause.

"Weel, a week ago, she cam' hame on the Sunday. She seemed very quiet like, and as I gaed oot the road a

bit wi' her at nicht, she says to me suddenly, says she, 'Hae the Hornes ony relations in Portobello?'

"'No, says I. 'They've nae relations at a' that I

ken o':'"

"' Well, they've frien's, then, faither, for Maister Gilbert spends a lot o' his time there. He's bidin' wi' folk in a little cottage at Joppa. I can show ye the hoose, and if it's true he's gaun to mairry Miss Inglis I wonder hoo she'd like to see him on the pier wi' anither lassie, as I've seen him mair nor once. I thocht maybe it was his cousin."

Gerard was silent a moment.

"There's something the matter, Charlie, undoubtedly. I am not surprised at what you tell me at all. I've seen him myself more than once with this very girl. But it begins to look a little more serious. What I can't understand is his boldness about it. Portobello is so near, and he does not appear to take any precautions to hide what is going on."

"Maybe he thinks that's the best way to hide it. Weel, do ye think I should mention it to the maister?"

"I don't. Wait a little, Charlie. Things will develop without us. After all, it's none of our business, is

it? Where did you say the house was?"

"On the road to Joppa; it's by name Rosearbour. It could be easily found. There could be nae herm in asking about the folk that bide there. I'd like to be at the bottom o't, for it's no' a common love affair, an', besides, there's Miss Inglis."

"Yes," said Gerard, slowly. "There's Miss Inglis." Bannerman, struck by the note in Gerard's voice,

looked at him intently.

But Gerard had discreetly turned his head away.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN CONFIDENCE

GERARD and Bannerman left the works together. The latter lived in Sinclair Street, Stockbridge, at the end of which Gerard parted with him. One of the secrets of Gerard's power over the men was that he was never too proud to acknowledge them in the day-time when they met in the streets. He would often walk with one of them part of the way home, asking a few kindly questions about his circumstances and family. This came naturally to him. He was immensely interested in all that concerned the workmen. One day, talking about it to Elsie, he said perhaps he had inherited some understanding of it from their mother, who had been the daughter of a labouring man.

It was an off night at the college, but he had promised Horne to attend in his place an evening meeting of a scientific association of which his employer was a member. Horne was prevented from attending himself because of a political dinner engagement at which he had to speak. But he was particularly anxious to obtain at first hand the report of a foreign delegate on some matter affecting the work of the laboratory.

Gerard had his employer's ticket of admission in his pocket. Before deciding whether to go home he looked at the hour of meeting, which was half-past seven. He had only time to step into a restaurant and get a cup of tea, then he walked rapidly to the place of meeting.

He was much interested in what he saw and heard

there, and the animated discussion he was able to follow intelligently, though some of the technical terms used puzzled him. The delegate spoke in French, with which language Gerard was perfectly familiar. Seldom

had he enjoyed a meeting more.

It was nine o'clock when he left it, and he had a long walk home. But it was a fine night, and in his pocket lay snugly a good cigar, which had been given to him by Horne after luncheon at the works. It had been arranged that Gerard was to take the mid-day meal with his employer and his son, an arrangement agreeable to Gerard when Horne himself was present. Once or twice, however, he and Gilbert had been compelled to eat alone, and the experience had not been particularly pleasant for Gerard. After their little encounter that evening he decided that it could not be repeated.

Gilbert Horne and his affairs occupied his whole thoughts during his steady, swinging walk to the Cleugh Cottage. What made them doubly interesting, nay, of the first moment, to him was his interest in the woman

Gilbert Horne was going to marry.

He had met her a few times at Burton Lea, and once had called by invitation at the house in Moray Place. And they had become friends with one of those strange leaps across the barriers of circumstance which happen only once or twice in a lifetime, and always

mark one of its epochs.

Mary Inglis was the woman Gerard would have given ten years of his life to marry, and doubtless this deeplying feeling was at the root of much antagonism to Gilbert Horne. At the same time he realised that even had Horne not been in the way his chance of success in such a quarter would have been small indeed. He knew the family atmosphere; he had gauged it pretty well on the two occasions he had encountered it. But the mere thought that Horne should be deceiving her or not playing the game straight filled him with fury

all the more powerful that it was kept under, and he told himself that he would leave no stone unturned to discover the mystery which undoubtedly at that moment enveloped much of Horne's actions. He could not pry, because he was too honourable, but he could keep his eyes and ears wide open, and use his judgment and opportunity as they occurred. He was eager and ready to defend the woman he had learned to love, not in the ordinary way of slow growth and selection, but in one of those inspirations which come only to some men, and leave them in no doubt. The story told to him by Bannerman troubled him beyond his power to express; he was still thinking of it and trying to sift it when he arrived at the gate of the Cleugh Cottage.

No member of the little family was more pleased than Gerard with the new home, and the miracle of grace and healing it had already worked in a short time on his mother was cause with him for the deepest

thankfulness.

Elsie heard the click of the gate, and drew the curtains to peep out. When she saw him coming down

the path she ran to meet him.

"There you are, dear!" she cried breathlessly. "Mr. Horne called to tell me you would be late. Mother has gone to bed; she was very tired when she came in from Trinity this evening."

"Was she at Trinity to-day?"

"Yes, I did not tell you. I was afraid you would disapprove. Mrs. Grahame asked her to spend the day, and Mabel brought her home."

"Did you let her go in alone?" he asked rather

gravely, as he followed her into the sitting-room.

"Yes, she begged so hard; she wants to be trusted, Humphrey, and it is quite right."

He looked relieved.

"Three months ago it would have been impossible. It seems to me that a good many miracles are happening in our lives, Elsie."

"I was thinking so only to-day. I am too happy, Humphrey; and to-night, since mother went to bed, I have felt that father has been very near us. I am sure he understands, and that he had to go to make all this possible."

"What a queer creature you are, Elsie. Now, I should accept all these happenings as natural, and not

trouble about occult reasons."

"But you called them miracles a moment ago. I am sure it is the garden and the woods that are working the miracle with mother. To-day she asked whether we might get some chickens. She lived on a farm, you know, when she was young. Do you think we might?"

"Why, certainly. I'll see about them to-morrow—

anything, dear, to interest her and keep her right."

"Well, take off your boots and tell me where you have been. There's coffee and some cold meat. I am hungry, too, for I waited, and, oh! there's a letter for you. It's from Biarritz, but not Biddy's writing."

He sprang up and took the letter from the mantelpiece. No, it was not Biddy's writing. The small, close, neat hand he recognised; he had seen it once

on the fly-leaf of a book.

"It's from Miss Inglis. Why should she write to me, I wonder?" he asked, but to Elsie's disappointment he did not break it open at once.

"Open it quickly and see. Gilbert wouldn't like it,

Humphrey, I am sure."

Gerard faintly smiled as he broke the seal of the dainty foreign envelope. There was only a very few lines written on one side of the sheet. After mastering them he passed it over to his sister.

"Hotel de Palais, Biarritz, "3rd April.

"DEAR MR. GERARD,—No doubt you will be surprised to hear from me, but I only want you to do me a little service. I am sure you will, because you are always willing, and think nothing a trouble. I

want you to go to Grant's and get me a whole set of the works of Dr. John Brown—that green morocco edition you admired at Moray Place-and I want you to take them to an old friend of mine. Miss Fiddes. who lives at Rosearbour, Joppa, just beyond Portobello. I believe the number is forty-three. I want you to get the parcel and take it down yourself, and tell Miss Fiddes it is for her birthday, which is next Tuesday. And tell her I will write in a day or two. I am not getting very strong just yet, and Biddy sometimes scolds me. It is very beautiful here, but sometimes I should be quite pleased to get home. If you will send me a line when you have done this I shall be very grateful. I want you to tell me exactly how dear Miss Fiddes is looking. I thought her so tired when I saw her last. I am afraid she is troubled about something. I hope I have not presumed on our very slight acquaintance. Please give my love to your sister, and believe me, yours sincerely,

"MARY FRANCES INGLIS."

"It was a little odd of her to write to you, Humphrey, don't you think? Why not Gilbert? He would certainly be angry."

"Perhaps she is not certain that he would attend to

such a little matter."

"Oh, Humphrey, it would not be a little matter if she wished it. I don't feel quite comfortable about it in my mind. Yes, I do think it strange all round."

"I'll do what she has asked, anyhow, to-morrow," said Gerard, as he slipped the letter into his pocket. It did not contain much, but it was sufficient to bring a glow to his heart out of all proportion to the worth of the incident.

The mere fact that she had written, that she had a behest for him, proved that he was not forgotten. He longed for the time when he might write to tell her that her behest had been obeyed.

"I haven't seen Gilbert to-day; he never comes in here," said Elsie, as she removed the steaming coffee from the hob to the table. "But Mr. Horne and Walter have both been in. It is a sort of half-way house, Humphrey, and how happy we are to see them. Don't you feel grateful to Mr. Horne?"

"I do. How grateful you will never know. I am trying to serve him to the best of my powers at the works, but Gilbert is a thorn in the flesh. We had a

sharp tussle to-night."

"He may be jealous. It is quite natural, for really already Mr. Horne has given you a very high place. But so long as you do your duty he can't hurt you."

"No, but he can make me jolly uncomfortable." "But no man need mind that, Humphrey Gerard," she said promptly. "It is only women who pay attention to trifles."

Humphrey smiled.

"You are great, little sister. Come, pour out my coffee. You are looking well yourself, as if the whole scheme of life agreed with you."

She poured out his coffee, but did not touch her own. Her wistful look struck Gerard presently, and he asked

what it meant.

"I was only thinking, Humphrey. Do you think men, like Mr. Horne I mean, often do good deeds from ulterior motives?"

"Whatever has put such a thought into your head, puss? Mr. Horne is one of the most generous of men.

I see it every day at the works."

"And he would not be one to ask a reward for them, would he?"

Gerard stared at her.

"I don't quite follow the tack you're on, Elsie, nor do I like it."

"I'm a sordid little wretch. Don't mind me; tell me about the meeting. Did you learn anything from it?" Gerard, in no way loth, gave her an account of what had passed. Elsie had the capacity for throwing herself heartily into whatever subject she discussed, and she had made it her business to master exactly the details of her brother's position at Bonnygate, so that she might be able to sympathise with and, if need be, help him in any way.

As they sat chatting after they had finished their meal Gerard wondered whether he should mention to his sister what Bannerman had told him that evening. She had a quick intuition, but perhaps it would be

wiser to keep his own counsel.

Quite suddenly Elsie turned his thoughts in a different irection.

"Humphrey, I don't believe Mary Inglis will ever marry Gilbert Horne."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, they are quite unsuited. I am sure she is not at all keen upon it. I am even certain that that is what partly made her ill."

He listened, deeply interested.

"What ground have you for saying that, Elsie? They have been engaged for over a year, and now everything seems settled; there is only the house to get."

"I know, but still I feel certain that the marriage will never take place. It was one of those mistaken engagements which ought never to have been entered into. Biddy told me how it came about, when they were on the Riviera last year."

"Then they go every year?"

"Yes; and last year Gilbert was at Mentone with them for a fortnight. They were engaged when he came home," she answered. "I am sure Mr. Horne thinks the same thing—that the marriage will not come off. He spoke of it to me only to-day."

"Well, I for one won't mind. I don't think Horne

nearly good enough for her," said Gerard simply.

"You would suit her," said Elsie with a sigh. "What a pity we are all so horribly poor!"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE EVENING CALL

THE person who has something to conceal develops all kinds of ingenuity in the discovery of fresh methods. Lily Morison, not naturally a reticent person, had acquired in a few short months the whole art of holding her tongue. When she reached Rosearbour the night after her visit to her aunt, Horne did not come as she had expected, which gave her time for reflection. Had her feelings and thoughts been analysed there would have been found in her the desire and determination to wait until her triumph should be more complete. She did not know what Gilbert was waiting for now, but he should pay dearly for it. Such was her reasoning, a bitter one, not likely to foster her affection for him.

From a confiding and happy girl she was fast developing into a hard and scheming woman, who kept her own interest in view. Her one desire was to be made right with her own people, to convince them beyond all doubt that she was married, and had in no way disgraced them, though she had caused them the deepest anxiety. When she discovered from the lawyer that beyond a doubt her position was perfectly legal her mind became much calmer. She could afford to wait. She could see that Gilbert on his rare visits was horribly worried; he was even growing thin over it. But she made no remark. She ceased to upbraid him when he came, or to put the never-ceasing question as to when she was to be acknowledged.

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She did not even mention when they met forty-eight hours after her Edinburgh experiences that she had been there, or that Miss Inglis had called at Rosearbour. Sometimes when he came he was moody and silent, at others talkative and railing against everything. She saw that he was intensely miserable. Having been so herself, she was not so unsympathetic as she might have been in the circumstances. He was often surprised and grateful for her forbearance and kindness. He began to take some pleasure even in his visits to Rosearbour, and they became more frequent. But while always quiet and apparently contented, she seemed to have lost her delight in his company.

They were no more like lovers, but rather friends, who had to meet the troubles of life together. It was a curious relationship, which sometimes struck him oddly. Once even he asked himself whether she had ceased to care altogether for him, and he was surprised by the sharpness of the doubt. She remained silent and waited. Some intuition told her that there was no need for her to seek to force or hasten the march of fate—that events were thickening, and soon the dénouement must come.

To the delight of Miss Fiddes, she seemed to take a new lease of interest in womanly things. The needle came into requisition again, and her young lodger seemed to be making preparations for some household event.

Her skill and art in needlework of every kind amazed the little spinster, and she never failed in her admiration for the results. Between the two quite a friendship had grown up, and there was not a single qualm in the little woman's heart. She deplored the circumstances which necessitated a wife so young and attractive being left so much alone, but she confessed that she bore her solitude admirably, and now made the best of it.

"Next week it is Easter," she said one day. "Do you think Mr. Gilbert is likely to get a few days' holiday then, Mrs. Gilbert? For I always like to go to the country then myself to visit an old friend who is an

invalid. We have kept up the custom for ten years, paying one another an alternate visit. But now she is not able to come to me any longer, I like to go to her."

"I don't know whether he will be here, but you can go just the same, dear Miss Fiddes. I should not at all

mind being left here alone."

"My dear, I would not do such a thing. When do you expect Mr. Gilbert again?"

"To-night. I had a note from him this morning to

say he would be back this evening."

"Why, there he is at the gate, is he not? My eyes are not so good as they were, but that is a gentleman's

figure at the gate."

"Yes, but it is not my husband. It must be some one for you, Miss Fiddes. Before you go to the door I will run to the kitchen, so that you may bring him in here."

A strong, firm foot sounded on the gravel of the little path outside. Lily gathered up her work quickly and fled, but not before she had cast a glance at the stranger from the window. She did not recognise him, however. She was certain she had never seen him before. He was carrying a small brown parcel, and looked like a person who came with a definite object.

Miss Fiddes opened the door to the stranger's knock and bade him a pleasant good evening. Visitors to the little house were very few, and a call from a perfect

stranger an event.

"Good evening, madam; my name is Gerard. You

do not know me?"

The kitchen door was a little ajar; the stranger's voice was deep, and Lily caught the name. She remembered it, and her heart began to beat.

Miss Fiddes shook her head.

"I have not the pleasure, sir, but if you wish to speak to me will you step in?"

"Thank you. I bear my credentials with me, I hope,

when I tell you I am the bearer of a message from Miss Inglis."

Miss Fiddes brightened at once, and her eyes sparkled with pleasure. To be remembered is always sweet, but it is the lonely, the possessors of few friends, who appreciate to the full the smallest token of that remembrance.

Gerard, a very tender-hearted man, was conscious of a sudden pathos in the smile of the little woman who was so sweetly courteous to him. She ushered him into the sitting-room and closed the door. Gerard laid his

parcel on the table.

"I had a letter from Miss Inglis at Biarritz yester-day," he explained, and the mere utterance of the fact gave him a pleasant sense of importance. "She asked me to fulfil a little behest for her, which was to get this gift, some favourite books of yours, and bring them to you as a little remembrance of your birthday."

Miss Fiddes clasped her hands together, and smiled.

"How very sweet and good of her to think of me when she is not strong, and has so many other things to occupy her thoughts. But that is just like Mary. I daresay you, who are her intimate friend, must know that."

Gerard found himself slightly embarrassed. He could certainly not lay claim to any great intimacy or friendship. He had himself been more than surprised that Miss Inglis should have asked him to do even this small service. Yet he was conscious of a glow of pleasure at the assumption of Miss Fiddes that there must be some hand between them.

He undid the string from the parcel and took out the books. The little spinster's eyes sparkled as she regarded them. She loved books, but had no money to spend on them, therefore every fresh contribution to her shelves, however small, was prized and cherished. But this beautiful edition almost took her breath away.

"This is far too good. Such expensive books, too! How did she know I would like those? I knew Dr.

Brown in my youth—that is to say, I remember him coming to my mother's house when I was a child."

"That was a great privilege surely," said Gerard, quite sincerely. He was in no hurry to go, because he wanted to hear her speak of Mary Inglis. Already the smallest item concerning her was of the deepest interest to him.

"Won't you sit down, sir, unless you are in a hurry. You have had a letter from Mary, you say? How is

she?"

"I think she is a little homesick."

"Ah, that is natural in the circumstances," she said, with her head a little on one side and a slightly conscious smile on her lips. "You know, of course, that she is going to be married soon? Do you know Mr. Gilbert Horne, to whom she is going to be married in the summer? June, I think, is the month fixed."

"Yes, I know him," replied Gerard, and even Miss Fiddes was conscious of a subtle hardening in his voice.

"I suppose it is a very suitable marriage. I have never seen him myself, but the family seem pleased. I could not help fancying that Mary was less eager about it than I expected to find her. Do you happen to know whether Mr. Horne has gone out to Biarritz, or whether

he is going?"

"He has not gone, Miss Fiddes. I saw him to-day."

"Ah, then naturally she would find the time hang heavily," she replied. "If you know Mr. Horne, and are such a friend of Miss Inglis, will you tell me whether they are suited? I have never met him, as I say, but I have often been anxious. The child is very dear to me, and her father has been my life-long friend as well as my cousin. Mary is a rare creature, Mr. Gerard. But she will ask a great deal from life. I mean that ordinary things will not satisfy. There are times when I have feared that this has been an arranged marriage, of which there are so many nowadays, since people have begun to attach so much importance to

material things. But-but I trust I am speaking to a friend of the family?"

"I am at least, Miss Fiddes," replied Gerard sin-"And I know that what you say about her is right."

"But Mr. Horne?" she pursued anxiously. "You know him, you say? Do you think he will make her

happy?"

Gerard felt himself absolutely at a loss. Surely never was a man placed in such an awkward predicament. Knowing what he did about Gilbert Horne, he could not honestly say he believed that he had the power to make a woman like Mary Inglis happy, and the more he learned about him the greater his perplexity over the engagement. He forgot that he had seen only one side, and that the least lovable side, of Gilbert Horne; also that his prejudice caused by personal antagonism prevented him doing him even scant justice. He did not answer at once, but Miss Fiddes took his silence as it was meant.

"I see that you are not very hopeful. I think it is a pity that such marriages should take place. I suppose

nothing can be done to prevent it?"

Gerard shook his head. If he could have prevented it there would be no hesitation on his part; indeed, he was surprised, being brought to such close quarters in this unexpected way, to find how deeply his own feelings were concerned. He rose to his feet. Having accomplished his errand, why remain to be tormented by such discussion, which could only be futile?

"I am afraid I must go, Miss Fiddes. I shall write to Miss Inglis and tell her her behest has been obeyed, and that you will write yourself. Have you the ad-

dress?"

"No; she promised to write, but I know what a trouble it is when one is abroad," she said.

"It is the Hotel de Palais. You will remember that, I am sure, Miss Fiddes," he said with a winning smile. "May I say what a pleasant place you have here, and

may I do myself the pleasure of calling on you sometimes, as we have a mutual interest? Some Sunday

afternoon, perhaps. I always take a walk then."

"I shall be very pleased," she answered readily. "Though I am not so well able to receive visitors as I used to be when I had the house to myself. If you don't mind a kitchen tea," she added with a little blush, "I shall be charmed to see you any Sunday afternoon."

"I assure you I should like nothing better, and perhaps one day you may be tempted to come as far as Cramond to be introduced to my mother and sister."

"Cramond? Why, the Hornes live there! Do you know their place, Burton Lea? I have always heard

how beautiful it is."

"I know it very well. I am in the employment of

Mr. Horne-in his chemical laboratory."

"Ah, then you are the gentleman who took Mr. Gilbert Horne's place when he was taken into partnership. Now I know where I am," she said pleasantly. "Thank you very much; I shall expect you one Sunday. I ought to explain to you that I have let off a part of my house to a young couple. It ought not to have been necessary, and had I taken the advice of my cousin, Lord Kilmartin, it would not have been. But I lent a sum of money to a friend I thought deserving, and she failed me, so now I—I have to make ends meet."

"But perhaps it is a good thing for you to have some one in the house with you," he said sympathetically.

"It must have been a solitary life here."

"I did not feel it so, and my friends came to me then. They have fallen away since. But the young lady who is with me is very pleasant—Mrs. Gilbert; her husband is a commercial traveller, and very little here. They are hoping that soon he will have some settled occupation, and that they may be able to get a home of their own. Then I shall find how much attached to them I have become."

A curious something seemed to clutch at Gerard's

heart, and he stared at her so intently that she looked uncomfortable. Then he drew himself together with an effort, telling himself the suggestion was too monstrous to be entertained for a moment.

"I hope everything will be arranged comfortably," he murmured inconsequently as he took up his hat. "Good-evening, Miss Fiddes. Thank you for receiving me so kindly. I shall write to Miss Inglis to-night and

tell her you are very well."

"Thank you, and I will write myself, too. Why, it seems to have grown dark quite quickly while we have been talking. The spring twilight seems to come down suddenly here; you see often after a very fine day we get the sea mist coming up. That is what has happened now. Good-night, Mr. Gerard. Thank you for coming, and pray be careful of the steps at the bottom of the

garden. They are uneven and a little steep."

Gerard thanked her and strode down the path. In an hour the atmosphere had changed. The sea mist, as she called it, had crept up swiftly, and now, like a chilly pall, seemed to cover everything. Involuntarily he pulled up the collar of his coat. As he opened the door in the high fence to let himself into the street some one paused there and stood back to let him pass. They looked at each other sharply, and the man on the outside uttered an oath of surprise and absolute dismay.

It was Gilbert Horne.

CHAPTER XXX

THE AWAKENING

THEY stared at one another for a full moment in silence, then Gerard walked rapidly away, his face as white as death, and set rigidly. As for Horne, his tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth. He stood still in the shadow of the privet hedge when the wicket had snapped close again absolutely at his wits' end. Gerard's presence there, of course, could have but one meaning. The game was up. He would go in and face Lily and see what she had to say. His face looked grey in the half-light, and as he went slowly up the path he took off his hat and wiped the drops from his brow. Again he swore at Gerard under his breath. Yes, spy had been the fitting word to use. The door was still open, Miss Fiddes peering anxiously out. She had seen the other figure at the lower end of the garden. and waited, hoping it would be her lodger's husband.

"It is you, Mr. Gilbert. I thought it might be. A

disagreeable evening, isn't it?"

"Very. Is Mrs. Gilbert at home?"

"Yes; she's in the kitchen," she answered with a little laugh. "She very kindly went in there while I entertained a visitor for myself in the parlour. You met him, I think, at the gate."

"Yes, I met him," he replied, trying to steady his voice, for Miss Fiddes spoke in a perfectly natural manner, and nothing unusual seemed to have occurred.

"A Mr. Gerard; I did not know him before, but he brought a message from a young friend of mine who had gone abroad—to Biarritz."

"Biarritz! I know some people who are there just now. Perhaps they may meet," he said inconsequently.

"What is her name?"

"Miss Inglis. She had gone with her mother, Lord Kilmartin's wife, and Miss Horne, the sister of her fiance. He brought me a message and a birthday gift from Miss Inglis. I had not met him before, but I liked him very much. But there, I must not keep you talking here so long and your dear wife waiting for you."

She darted off to the kitchen, and a moment later

Lily came out.

She was looking remarkably well in a black silk frock, which her own hands had fashioned, and which showed off the delicate fairness of her skin to perfection. She wore a soft fall of white lace across her breast, and had a sweet, dainty look, which Horne noted. At the same time he was puzzled by her natural expression, which indicated nothing unusual.

"There you are, Gilbert, a little earlier than I ex-

pected. How are you?"

He took her by the arm and drew her into the room,

where he shut the door.

"I'm bowled over for the moment, Lil," he answered.
"Can you tell me how that infernal spy, Humphrey Gerard, managed to poke his nose in here; and who is Miss Fiddes, for heaven's sake? Did you know she was any relation to the Inglises, and that she knew all about my people, though she doesn't know they are mine, of course?"

Lily laughed a little, as she might have been amused

at a comedy in which she had no particular part.

"I've known for more than a month that Miss Fiddes was a relative of the Inglises. I never told you, but one day Miss Inglis came here to see Miss Fiddes. She was out, and I spoke to her at the door. She remembered me."

Horne stared in dumb dismay.

"It's a horribly ghastly complication, and you ought to have told me at once, that we could have cleared out.

You are not playing the game, Lily."

"I didn't think of it; I was too comfortable with Miss Fiddes, and what did it matter anyhow? She is an unsuspecting old soul, and as for Miss Inglis, she thought I was paying a call here the same as herself."

"Did you speak to her?"

"Why, of course; she remembered me at once. I didn't tell her I was living here, stupid, and she offered to drive me back to town in her carriage-two horses, Gibbie, and a footman on the box, but I didn't accept it, which was very self-denying of me, especially as I happened to be going up to town anyway that very day." "I thought you promised me you wouldn't go up."

"I'm only flesh and blood, Gibbie, besides, I had business to do that day—business which couldn't wait."
"I don't trust you, Lily; there's some underhand

business going on which I don't like."

"I can say the same thing, Gilbert. I've known for ever so long that those were lies you told me about it being your brother Walter who is engaged to Miss Inglis. Miss Fiddes told me it was the second son, and my aunt told me too."

"You've been to see your aunt, then, in spite of all

my entreaties?"

"Yes, and I'm going back, perhaps, to-morrow."

"Perhaps you've seen your father and your sister, too, and the rest of the people who live in that horrible stair. Perhaps they're all interested in this house, now, and know all about us," he said with a sneer.

"Perhaps they do," she said indifferently. they don't know it from me. I've only seen my Aunt

Isabel once, but if I'd seen the whole show it wouldn't matter to you. And I want to know what you're



Gilbert stared at her in wonderment.



going to do now about Miss Inglis. She's getting her providing ready, for she's placed the most of her order with my Aunt Isabel. I could have had some of it to sew if I'd liked," she said with a note of irony in her voice. "Now whether is it you or me who is going to write to Biarritz?"

He sat down, tugging violently at his moustache, his eves veiling the dark thoughts of his mind. He was completely in her power; there was not the smallest loophole of escape. From under his veiled lids he eved her, marvelling at the quiet assurance with which she spoke, and thinking how a word from him would shatter it. But he could not speak it yet; he needed further time to think and plan how he could best get himself out of the horrible depths to which he had sunk. Again and again he inwardly cursed the stupendous folly which had arranged the matter so poorly. It all came of being too soft and yielding where a woman was concerned.

"You're determined to force my hand, I see, Lily. Well, you'll be sorry for it," he said significantly.

"I'm in no particular hurry," she replied serenely. "I can afford to wait a little longer if it's going to be of any use to you or to anybody. It's Miss Inglis I'm thinking about. It's a shame, Gilbert, to let her go on getting ready, and it'll make the scandal all the greater when it comes out. Now's your chance to break off the engagement while she's abroad. It would be easier. There's only her father at home just now, and, according to Miss Fiddes, he's an old sheep."

Gilbert stared at her in wonderment that was absolute. Could this calm, self-reliant woman thus laying down the law be the same hysterical girl that had driven him to take a step which had been fatal in its con-

sequences?

"You have it all cut and dry," he said quietly, and with a curious note of strain in his voice. "Then after I've written to Miss Inglis-I don't deny that we were engaged once," he added as an afterthought. "What

happens then?"

Well, then, you take me to see your people at Burton Lea, or tell your father, I don't care which," she added cheerfully. "But I think it had better be done soon, as I say, before they come back from Biarritz. It'll be easier then, Miss Inglis needn't come back for a time if she doesn't feel inclined."

"You are very considerate about Miss Inglis. I think we'd better leave her out of the count," he said drily. "Supposing for a moment I acted on your suggestion and told my governor, what I warned you of before will certainly happen; he'll kick me out of the

house and works."

"Well, if you're certain that's going to happen, why lose any more time? It's better to be done with it."

"You don't realise what it means, child," he said.

"It is useless talking to you on the subject."
"No; you are wrong," she said quite quietly. "It is you who don't realise what all this means to a woman-to two women, indeed, for I don't know which will suffer most. Miss Inglis in her pride, or I in my shame. For I am ashamed as I have never been. I did wrong, wicked wrong, to marry you without my father's knowledge or consent, and to go on with all this horrible and degrading secrecy. But if I've done wrong, at least I've been punished, and maybe my punishment is not at an end yet."

At the word "marry" he winced, but she did not

"How do you mean that you will suffer more?"

"Well, I shall have to live all my life with you, now I know what you are," she replied, and he flung up his head and regarded her intently. A few weeks ago such speech from her lips would have been impossible. Where was the clinging, tearful, easily-pacified girl he had wooed and won on the green slopes of Blackford Hill? Surely this quiet, calm woman had no kinship with her. He could not but admire the change, and yet he was a little afraid too, for he did not know what

the next act of the drama was going to be.

"You think I'm an awful scoundrel, of course," he said lamely. "But I tell you there's excuse, and you were keen enough, too, at the beginning. There were not so many questions to ask then. The fact is, Lil, we've been a couple of young fools, and instead of upbraiding one another we ought to lay our heads together and try to make the best of it."

"Well, I think that's what I'm doing. If I could live the last year over again I'd leave you out of it,

Gilbert."

"I don't go so far as that," he replied gallantly. "And you needn't be so relentless. The rôle of hard woman doesn't suit you. It belongs to your sister, though I've never seen her."

"Well, let's get down to hard facts once more.

When will you write to Miss Inglis?"

"To-morrow; but perhaps I'll be saved the necessity. There was mischief in Gerard's face just now when I met him. Probably by the time I get back he'll have got his cock-and-bull story poured into the governor's ears."

Lily looked puzzled.

"But I don't understand why he should feel suspicious. Why, you might have been taking a message from Miss Inglis to her relative. What did he want

here anyhow?"

"Exactly what you have just said. Miss Inglis seems to have written to him, though why I'd give my head to know. He has cheek enough for anything. He's undermining me as fast as he can at Bonnygate, and if he gets my father's ear first, I'll be kicked out as sure as fate. The governor's a hard man, as I've told you before."

"He'd only be hard on wrong, Gilbert. Nothing will ever make me believe that he is really hard-hearted. I

have seen and heard him, and I know."

"Of course you know best. The amount of knowledge you've acquired in the last few weeks is astonishing, but it's just possible you may over-reach yourself."

She smiled a little, and suddenly spoke out that

which was in her mind.

"I believe this, Gilbert, that your father would forgive me quick enough—that is, he would not think you had sunk so very low. After all, we belong to a very respectable family, and my father's pride, I assure you, is as great as yours. What Mr. Horne, I believe, won't forgive is your deceit, and the way you've used Miss Inglis. I have nothing to fear from him. Put that right, and he'll think the other thing, meaning me, a very small item to be angry about."

She spoke reasonably, and there was a convincing note in her voice, which showed Horne that she had

gone deeply into the matter.

A word from him, he knew, or at least believed, would shatter all her happy assurance, but he could not bring himself to speak it yet. It was his nature to temporise, to play with danger even, and never to take the straight path, if the crooked would do. So he spoke

again.

"Look here, Lily, what you say's all true, but we must go warily. You must permit me to know a little about my own people, and the ways of my own set, which, after all, are a little removed from yours. I will tell my father I can't keep to my engagement with Miss Inglis. It was made long ago, remember, before I ever saw you, and when he presses me for the reason I'll own up that there's somebody else. I must get him over the ground bit by bit; tell him one thing at a time. He's very passionate, and won't stand any nonsense. When he has recovered from the shock of the broken engagement, I'll tell him the full truth, I promise you."

"Just as you like; either you or I must do it, and I shall have to see the letter Miss Inglis writes after she

gets yours giving her up."

Horne bit his lip. He resented her assumption of right to know his private affairs, but though a word could destroy it for ever he abstained from uttering it. He had not the faintest idea where he was drifting now or what would be the end of it. But some course of action undoubtedly had become necessary. He remembered the mischief in Gerard's eyes.

"Well, I'll go home to-night—now, in fact, and tell the governor I'm off with Miss Inglis, and I'll run down perhaps to-morrow, if I'm alive, and show you a copy of the letter I write to Miss Inglis. I can't say fairer than

that. Will it satisfy you?"

She gave a little nod. Her face was not easy to read. Had he been a close observer he might have seen a mist of unshed tears in her deep eyes. She was completely disillusioned, and at the moment was thinking with something akin to dismay of what her life would be like, spent always by the side of this man, to whom lies came so easily, and whose word was uttered only to be broken. It was a psychological moment in Lily Morison's experience, one in which surely she expiated her sin. But she hid it deep in her heart, as the true woman will, and none ever knew what she had suffered.

"Very well," she said quietly. "Perhaps that will

be best."

She did not press him to stay, as was her wont, and

her lukewarmness piqued him a little.

"I don't believe you care either way, Lil," he said lightly, as they lingered a moment on the doorstep. "Would it vex you very much if I never came back, if, for instance, I were to scoot, as many a chap would do in the circumstances, afraid to face the music? Upon my word, if I had the brass we'd clear this very night. And anyhow, we must make arrangements to get you away from here at once. I can't have that hound, Gerard, prying round. He'll be interviewing you next."

"That he won't. Good night, Gibbie. Do your best to face the music. I've always heard that's what

men like-courage, I mean. If you show the white

feather, your father will be twice as hard on you."

"I'll have one satisfaction out of it anyhow," he said under his breath. "I'll give that infernal sneak just one taste of my fist before I'm done with him."

And he fully meant what he said.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE WATCHER AT THE GATE

GERARD walked away from the gate of the little seaside house, his soul filled with a horror unspeakable.

When he thought of the double game Gilbert Horne had been undoubtedly playing all these months, his indignation knew no bounds. But it was perfectly

futile, nothing could alter the facts.

One by one he went over all those who would suffer through the sin of one. Mary came first, as was natural; and he could picture the wound a sensitive spirit like hers would sustain when she learned how she had been made the sport of a weak and wicked man. He clenched his fist at his side; the desire to avenge her was like to overmaster him. powerful friends indeed, and would need no champion in him, yet at the moment he felt that he could have died to serve her. Then the old man, whose face so often wore an anxious look, and Biddy and Walter, who had extended the frank hand of friendship to him, and hoped he would do well at Bonnygate. In such mood he came to the terminus where the cars stood, where he climbed to the top of one, heedless of the rain that was now beating through the mist. He could not face the passengers inside, he told himself; he must be alone to ponder on what his course of action must be. That he had driven Horne into a corner unintentionally, but still effectually, was beyond doubt; he must now make a move of some kind. The bold effrontery of the man in taking so little precaution to

hide the double life he was leading filled him with amazement, and the whole chain of circumstances that had led to its discovery showed him how futile after all were the efforts of human beings to stay the march of destiny. They may scheme and plan, and to a certain extent seem to conquer, then at the last barrier they will be confronted with complete overthrow. The forces at work were too stupendous for their competition. The wise man, therefore, pursues the straight path, and waits with serene heart the uplifting of the Great Plan.

Gerard's thoughts were sufficient to occupy him fully until he came to Princes Street, but he was no nearer solution of the problem confronting him. Should he take action at once, or wait to see what Horne was prepared to do. He was in no haste to tell his employer what he had discovered to convince him that all his forebodings, so often expressed concerning his younger

son, were destined to be bitterly realised.

Gerard naturally imagined the worst. In the meantime he was not concerning himself much with the woman who had won Horne away from his allegiance to Mary Inglis. Perhaps it was natural that he should dismiss her in one unworthy thought. He was in no mood to go home, where he knew Elsie would be waiting for him, ready with her questionings. It would not be well to tell her. No, she must be spared as long as possible. As he turned his face northwards he thought suddenly of Bannerman, who knew a part at least of what had happened. He felt that it might be wise to see him; the need for some sympathy and advice as to what his own action should be became insistent. It was nearly nine o'clock, but Sinclair Street was within easy distance. He determined to go there.

He found Bannerman at home, sitting peaceably by his own fireside, reading the newspaper to his wife, whom he introduced with pride; a comely woman with a pleasant motherly face, the woman who had homemaker written on her every feature. The Bannermans were admirable types of that class which is the real backbone of the nation's life—honest, self-respecting, capable working folk, with the fear of God in their hearts, desiring to do their duty by God and man, and fearing nothing but wrong in the world. Gerard long remembered that pleasant picture of what a home should be, and Bannerman's ready smile as he rose from the fireside, the picture of comfort in his carpet slippers and his old flannel jacket, to welcome his unexpected visitor.

"Good evening, Charlie. Mrs. Bannerman, I'm proud to make your acquaintance," said Gerard in his easy, pleasant way. "I must apologise for disturbing you at such a late hour, but I have something particular

to say to Charlie."

"A' richt. We're fell pleased to see you," said Bannerman. "The wife was jist sayin' she was gaen to her bed. We're early folk. She's up at the back o' five every mornin', Maister Gerard. I dinna gang oot without my cuppie o' tea, simmer or winter."

"What for should ye?" she asked with her pleasant

smile. "Guid nicht, sir."

"Good night," said Gerard, and held open the door for her, which surprised her not a little. Then he approached the fireplace, and sat down on the extreme edge of the table, and looked at Bannerman, where he stood with his pipe in his hand.

"Charlie, I've been down to Joppa, and I have seen Gilbert Horne at the house you told me of, and he saw

me too."

Bannerman laid down his pipe, and stared too.

"Well, I never! Hoo did ye find oot?"

"Oh, that was a mere accident. I did not go down there with any idea of discovering or prying into things. In fact I had hardly digested what you told me the other day. It happened I had a message to deliver to a lady, from Miss Inglis in fact, at that very house, and as I went out by the gate Horne went in."

Bannerman looked perplexed.

"It's a bittie mixed, isn't it? Hoo did ye happen to be deliverin' a message frae Miss Inglis at that house?"

"You may well ask, but it came about quite naturally. I had a letter from Miss Inglis the other day, asking me to execute a little commission for her—to buy a present for a lady friend of hers who lives at Joppa, a Miss Fiddes."

"That was the name that Annie gied me. I minded

it efter," said Bannerman.

"Miss Fiddes lets off a part of her house," continued Gerard. "She has a young couple at present, man and wife, as she supposes—Horne and the woman for whom he has left Miss Inglis."

"Eh, michty, sic ongauns!" said Bannerman, wiping his forehead with a large red pocket-handkerchief.

"Are ye sure?"

of Miss Inglis. Horne can't have known it, of course, and it just shows how impossible it is to cover up wrongdoing. After I had delivered my message, she told me about her lodgers, mentioning that their names were Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert. Don't you see it's as plain as a pikestaff? What I can't understand is how he dared."

"It's a michty queer story, and there'll be mair trouble," said Bannerman thoughtfully. "Did you

meet him, did you say?"

"At the gate, and he knew me, of course. He swore at me plainly enough. I didn't wait. I was too sick at the thought of the whole ghastly business. What do you suppose will happen next?"

Bannerman shook his head.

"It's forced his hand, of course. He'll hae to gie up wan or the ither."

Gerard shook his head impatiently.

"It's not a question of that at all, I hope, Charlie. The bare thought of it in connection with a woman like Miss Inglis is intolerable. It is a mercy at the moment that she is so far from Edinburgh."

"Are ye to tell the maister?"

"That's the particular point on which I want your advice, Charlie. It'll be a terrible blow to him, and I don't want to be the first to inflict it. Do you think we should wait, a day or so at least, and see what step Gilbert himself will take?"

Bannerman pondered a moment.

"It's no easy kennin' what to do," he said slowly scratching his head. "It's an ill story onywey ye like to tak' it. I'm no' keen on waitin'. He's a slippery customer is Gilbert Horne, an' he'll get the better o' ye yet if you're no clever."

"I can't go down to Burton Lea and tell the old man, Charlie. Upon my word, I can't. He's been awfully good to me. I couldn't bear to see his spirit

humbled as it will be by this thing."

"I wad wait or the morn, or ye hae seen Gilbert," said Bannerman quietly. "It's plain as a pikestaff that you'll hae to see the thing through. If he doesna gie ye a chance ye maun seek it, an' ask what he is gaun to do. Ye are perfectly entitled to pit it till him like that. I wad dae it myself if there was naebody else."

"He'll resent it, Charlie. He looked at me like

thunder."

"Does that maitter? He hasna a leg to stand on. He micht try to bluff ye, but ye hae him at every pint. Gang hame, Maister Gerard, and sleep on't, and dinna let it worry ye ower muckle. It's no' the first time I've been sorry for the maister. A straight man himsel', as ye say, this'll be a fell blow till him."

Gerard saw the wisdom of the advice, and determined to act upon it. He would at least sleep the night on it if such a thing were possible, and in the morning see what attitude of mind Horne was in. Some action he

must take, of course, after what had passed.

It was after ten when he reached the Cleugh Cottage,

tired out with the day's work and the exciting events of the evening. There was still a light in the window, and on the blind he could see the shadow of a head bent over some work at the table. When he entered his mother came out with a candle to light the little hall. They had nothing but lamp and candle at the Cleugh Cottage. It was all in primitive style, and suited the bits of old furniture which had been Captain Gerard's hobby.

These weeks of country life had wrought a marvellous change in Mrs. Gerard. As she held the candle high and the light fell on her face, Humphrey was struck by its comeliness. She had been very pretty in her youth, and now that the grossness of over-indulgence was wearing off, something of the old winsomeness had returned to her face. Her neat black gown, with the white collar and cuffs, suited her well. Humphrey felt a momentary thrill of pride in his mother. She had always been a fondly indulgent mother to her children, seeing no evil in them, and never checking them for a single childish fault. It was indeed a wonder that they had grown up so good as they were.

"I'm sorry I'm late, mummy," he said, using the old childish name which came naturally to his lips. "Has

Elsie gone to bed?"

"Yes, she seemed tired. I said I would sit up for you. You have been to Portobello, haven't you?"

"Yes, come in, and I'll tell you. I'll be glad of a cup

of coffee. Yes, but I don't want anything to eat."

He sat down, and while his mother busied herself with the spirit lamp under the coffee pot, he wondered whether he should tell her. The temptation was great,

but would it be wise?

"I've been writing to Aunt Georgie," she said presently, glancing towards the table. Gerard looked the astonishment he felt. Aunt Georgie was their father's only sister, a great lady in her own estimation, who had long since repudiated her sister-in-law, and refused to recognise her.

"I wanted to tell her how happy we are here, and how good my children are to me, Humphrey. She wrote a very hard letter when your father died, though I didn't show it to you; I have never forgotten it. She was quite justified in writing it. Your father was her only brother, and she said I had ruined his life. It was quite true, Humphrey."

"Aunt Georgie had no business to write any such thing to you," he cried hotly. "Whether true or not,

it was no concern of hers."

"Oh, yes, it was. He was her brother, you see. She felt about him as Elsie feels about you," she replied quietly. "But she is a good woman at the bottom, Humphrey. She was once very kind to me at Bedford, when I didn't deserve it. I have told her everything, and even asked her to come here and see us, so that she can judge for herself that I really am a better woman."

"Don't mother! I hate to hear you speak like that."

"Ah, but it's all true, so you needn't feel like that," she said sadly. "When I see how easy it is to be happy on very little, if only people behave right, I feel dreadful, Humphrey. I can't think why God spared me so long, and took away your father, who was the best of men."

He did not know how to answer her, and her words

distressed him not a little.

"Don't let's talk about it, mother, but be thankful that we are happy now. We owe it all to Mr. Horne, and, poor man, I am afraid he has his own troubles."

She stopped by the table as she was gathering up her writing materials, and looked at him with an arresting

look

"Humphrey, he comes here a good deal; far more than you or anybody knows. I am afraid it is Elsie."

"Elsie?" he said in a bewildered voice.

"Yes, Elsie. He cares about her. I'm only the looker-on, so I see everything. Good night, dear. It's a queer world, and life is wonderful. But don't let things

worry you. You'll do well because you've got your father's straight outlook. Nobody will tempt you from the right road, thank God."

She kissed him with more than her usual tenderness, and he did not seek to detain her. Nay, he was conscious

of a certain relief when she left the room.

With his mind so full of the events of the evening, he would have found it difficult to keep his own counsel perhaps, and in the meantime it was advisable not to be precipitate in any of his actions. But the chance hint she had dropped concerning Elsie opened up an entirely new vista of thought, which somewhat diverted him from the other subject. Eleven o'clock rang while he was still thinking, then reflecting that the morning with its new duties would come all too quickly, finding him unprepared, he rose and went to lock up the house. It was his custom to walk round the outside of the little domain every night, it being a somewhat lonely dwelling, very accessible to tramps from the high road. One night, indeed, he had found two sleeping in the summer-house.

The rain had now ceased, and the sky was breaking overhead. The air was full of the sweet scents of the opening spring. The sweetbriar hedge which skirted the little garden sent forth its delicious contribution, and seemed to fill the whole night with its fragrance. He walked out to the gate, and put the bolt in, and at the moment he heard a step on the road. He waited. It was unusual for any one to pass so late. Perhaps he expected that it might be Gilbert Horne. The next

moment he knew that it was.

He undid the bolt again, and stepping out into the road waited for him. As well perhaps to have it out,

here and now.

Horne strode on, and, recognising Gerard, his blind fury got the mastery over him. Before Gerard could protect himself, he received a blow between the eyes, which felled him.

"Take that, you meddling sneak; and learn to mind

your own business after this."

CHAPTER XXXII

IN THE NIGHT

THE house was all dark when Horne reached it; the light in his father's bedroom window went out just as he turned the sweep of the avenue which hid the house from view until one was almost close upon it.

He paused a moment irresolute, not knowing what to do. He had been away so much lately that the door had never been left on the latch for him, and orders had been given that no servant was to open it after midnight. Once or twice Gilbert had returned about that hour, and had had to suffer the humiliation of being let in by his father in an ominous silence. But this night that was an experience he did not court.

He had left Humphrey Gerard lying on the path outside the gate of the Cleugh Cottage, but whether

stunned or dead he neither knew nor cared.

He must get away, he told himself, from the scene of his life's shipwreck. He knew the lower windows of the house well. Always a scapegrace, many a time he had gained admittance by them at an hour when others were asleep. The watch-dog in the kennel near the kitchen door was silent on his chain, knowing the step and the low voice that spoke caressingly to him, bidding him keep quiet. A brief examination discovered a pantry window on the latch. His penknife soon undid that, and though the window was small he managed to squeeze himself through. Once within and seeing food on the shelves, he remembered that he

was hungry, having eaten nothing since the cup of tea which was served at the works' dining-room at four o'clock. He consumed a portion of a game pie with relish, and then set about getting out. The door was, fortunately, not locked, and presently he found himself roaming about in the huge basement of the house.

Duncan, sleeping the sleep of the just in his cosy little room in the basement, close by the pantry, heard nothing, for the marauder, slipping about in his stockings, did not make a sound, nor did he strike a light

until he was safe on the upper floor.

He made for the library, where he lit a small gas-jet and pulled out his purse and pocket-book. In the latter he had bank-notes for fifty pounds, a handful of gold loose in his pocket, and some silver in his purse. Satisfied that he was in no immediate want, that he could get away with an early morning train without trouble, and knowing that once clear he could draw on his own banking account, he breathed more freely. He had cashed a large cheque a few days before, being haunted by an uneasy feeling that some emergency would arise necessitating the possession of ready money. Now he must get to his own room and obtain a change of clothing and one or two valuables he prized. He put out the light, and crept back to the hall. There he struck a light, and glanced at the letters which stood in the delivery box. He drew them out, three in number, all addressed to himself.

He winced, observing that one was in the handwriting of Mary Inglis, and bore the Biarritz postmark. He shoved them in his breast-pocket and crept noiselessly upstairs, reaching his own room, which, fortunately for him, was not near those occu-

pied by his father and brother.

Mr. Horne occupied a large front room above the library, while Walter had lately gone up to a small bachelor room next to his own den, where he could

study undisturbed.

Gilbert slipped about softly, and began quickly to collect a few things he would require on an immediate journey. He must choose sparingly, since he had no alternative but to walk up to town unless he should be so fortunate as to hail a cab returning from leaving some reveller or late diner on the way. A suit of clothes, some necessary linen, his toilet articles—that was all. He glanced regretfully at the full wardrobe, for he had always prided himself on being one of the best dressed men in Edinburgh. But he had to steel himself and ruthlessly turn the key in the bag. He made a small bonfire in the grate of stray letters lying about in the drawers.

On the mantlepiece there was a beautiful portrait of Mary Inglis in evening dress, with the folds of a white cloak falling away from her shoulders. He turned its face to the wall, for his imagination seemed to suggest that her eyes were following him with a mournful reproach.

In half an hour he was ready to go. He did not desire nor wait to write the usual message to be looked for in such circumstances, his hope being that he would not be missed for a time sufficient to let him get clear

away.

He slipped down the stair again, returning to the pantry by the way he had come, and shutting himself in there put on his boots. His bag went easily through the narrow aperture, he followed, and was quickly on the wide avenue which led away from the house. But after he reached the bend he took another thought. It was a fine night. He could take the field paths which stretched away from behind the house, and from which he could reach the high road at a point nearer town; then he would not be obliged to pass by the Cleugh Cottage. He had no qualms about the man he had left there, felled to the ground by his well-directed blow. He did not for a moment believe or expect that he had killed him, and even if he had, in his present

mood, he did not care. His mind was so unbalanced and distorted by the perplexities of his life that he was disposed to blame them all on Gerard, whose impertinent interference had brought matters to an untimely crisis.

Just as he slipped round the end gable of the house, he saw the light flash in his father's window again, indicating that he was still awake. Fearful lest he had, in spite of his precautions, disturbed the household, he hastened his steps, plunged into the thickness of the young wood behind, and was quickly out of sight. He did not pause to cast one regretful glance back, though his feelings were of a very mixed nature as he put the distance between himself and the home of his boyhood. When he reached the high road at a point about half a mile beyond the Cleugh Cottage he had a piece of luck.

The rumble of wheels came up behind, and he waited in the shelter of the hedge. Yes, it was a cab trundling home after depositing some people who had been attending a ball in town. The driver was half asleep on the box, but wakened up at the prospect of a return fare, and Gilbert rode comfortably for the remainder of the way to Princes Street, where he dismissed the man, and sought a hotel. He took care, however, that the man did not see where he went. He slept the night at the Station Hotel, and in the very early morning took his seat in a train bound for Carlisle.

The night passed at Burton Lea. Mr. Horne did not sleep soundly. He knew that Gilbert was not in the house. Matters were coming to a crisis in his mind also, and he had determined that the very next day he should present an ultimatum to his son. He could no longer endure the strain of the mystery in the background, and the complications likely to ensue where the Inglises were concerned troubled him greatly. He was not only himself one of the most honourable of men, he was extremely sensitive concerning his family honour and Gilbert had no idea how many sleepless and miser able nights he had caused his father of late. Walter

was early astir next morning, having to attend an early class. He breakfasted alone, and set out to walk to town enjoying the delicious freshness of the spring morning. Half-way down the avenue, however, he met the little maid-servant from the Cleugh Cottage running in breathless haste.

Kate was very happy in her new environment. The child of the slums had developed an extraordinary kinship with the country life and ways, and she was a comfort untold to the little household that had learned to know her worth.

"Oh, please, sir, ye are to come quick. Something

terrible's happened at oor place."

"What is it?"

"Maister Humphrey. He wasna in a' nicht, evidently, for the roadman that cam' by at six o'clock found him lyin' ootside the gate, jist as if somebody had knockit him down. No, he's no' deid, but he's unconscious. I've been for the doctor, an' he's there noo. "He says it's concussion o' the brain or something. I'm gaun for Maister Horne. Miss Elsie sent me."

"All right. Go on to the house, and I'll see whether I can be of any use at the cottage," said Walter, and

strode on with the greatest possible haste.

The doctor's trap was at the gate when he came within sight of the cottage, and just as he reached it he came out. It was the Cramond doctor, whom Walter knew very well, though he did not attend at Burton Lea.

"Good morning, Mr. Walter. Curious business this."
"What is it? I met the servant girl, but she seemed

a trifle incoherent."

"Mr. Gerard had evidently been attacked by some one on the road, probably when he went to lock up. His mother said she heard him outside just after eleven, which was his usual time. But she did not hear any altercation or noise of scuffling. We may dismiss the idea of any tramp, I think, for nothing in his pocket has been touched."

An indefinable change passed over Walter's face.

"It is curious. Is he conscious then—can he give

any account of himself?"

"He is not conscious. I'm going in for some help. Jump in; we're going the same way. I didn't wait for the groom. He got me the trap ready, and I drove in myself. She's very quiet, the mare. Hitch her to the gate post, and she'll stand as long as you like."

Walter hesitated a moment, reflecting how little he could do inside. "I ought to go in, I think," he said

hesitatingly.

"Well, I'll wait five minutes, though really there's nothing any one can do in the meantime. There's no sign of other violence. It looks as if he had received a sudden knock-down blow from some unexpected quarter before he had a chance to defend himself. And of course he fell heavily, being a tall man, and of a fair weight."

"It was a dastardly thing, and apparently without motive," said Walter as he ran down the slope of the garden path to the cottage door. Elsie met him there,

looking white and anxious.

"Will your father come, Walter?" she asked quickly.

"He can always put things right."

"He was not down when I left the house, Miss Elsie," he replied rather dully. "Is there nothing I can do?"

"Nothing. Isn't it a dreadful thing? The worst is that he has lain there all night. Why, if it had been cold or wet, as it so often is, nothing could have saved him. And, even now, he looks quite dreadful."

"Have you any theory?"
She shook her head.

"None. It is the greatest mystery. It can't have been an ordinary tramp who wanted money, for nothing has been touched—his gold watch and his ring, and he had over five pounds in his pocket, quite a large sum for him. It is all there and quite safe."

"It is a mystery. I'm very sorry for you, Elsie. I wish I could help you."

She smiled.

"It is a help to see you, and to hear your kind voice." she said quite sincerely, words which sent Walter com-

forted upon his way.

Yet he felt useless and impatient with himself as he listened half-heartedly to the doctor's cheery talk. In the ordinary affairs of life where other men were alert, and quick, he was always at a loss, not adaptable; he told himself rather dismally that he had none of those qualities which women most admire in a man. Poor Walter, for once the student habit, the allurement of the very profession on which he had set his heart, failed

Meanwhile at Burton Lea the message from the cottage had been delivered to Mr. Horne just as he was

leaving his dressing-room.

Lively concern immediately sprang into his face, and Duncan, who delivered the message, hesitated a moment before he said something else, which was lying rather heavily on his mind.

"Mr. Gilbert did not sleep at home last night, sir."

"No, Duncan, but we're getting used to that," replied his master with a faintly ironical note in his voice. "Mr. Gilbert will go on until he finds himself cut off from Burton Lea."

"Yes, sir, but something queer happened last night. When cook went into the larder this morning she called me to come and look. The window was open, and there were footmarks over all the floor. Somebody had been in, and had helped themselves to food, too, for the game pie was eaten."

"Burglars, Duncan," said the master sharply. "Somebody's to blame. You're not half careful enough about all these windows and doors. I didn't sleep soundly myself, but I didn't hear a bark from Bruce.

He had a quiet night."

"It wasn't no burglars, sir," said Duncan hesitatingly.

"And though Mr. Gilbert did not sleep at home, he's been there, and packed a bag, Hannah says. His room's

upside down, and some of his clothes away."

Duncan felt sorry for his master, and discreetly looked away as he spoke. Horne never answered, but took the stair several steps at a time, caught up his hat from the stand, and left the house.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE MYSTERY

IN ten minutes' time he was at the Cleugh Cottage.

Mrs. Gerard admitted him. Her face grave and
anxious, in reply to his quick inquiry, she merely shook
her head.

"He lies just the same, Mr. Horne. The doctor has gone into Edinburgh driving in his own trap to fetch out Professor Meiklejohn."

Horne thrust his left hand into his pocket and followed

her into the sitting-room.

"I needn't say I'm sorry—that feebly expresses it,

Mrs. Gerard. Have you any theory about it?"

"None; I don't know what he thinks. I said goodnight to him just as eleven was striking, and I could not have been in bed when it happened, for I heard him making the round of the garden, as he has done every night ever since he found the tramps in the summerhouse. He always locks up last thing himself."

"He was at a meeting for me last night, of course, at the Institute, but it should have been over by nine o'clock, unless the discussion was very animated. Did

he happen to say?"

"He had been somewhere else after it, but he did not say."

"He seemed all right?"

"Quite. We had a cup of coffee, and we talked a

little about family affairs."

Horne nodded sympathetically, but did not venture on speech. He saw that a very little would break her down. He therefore tried to change the subject.

"How is Miss Elsie this morning?"

"She is all right. Now, of course, she is as anxious

as I am. Would you like to come up and see Humphrey? We carried him upstairs with the help of the roadman who found him, and he went for the doctor."

Horne opened the door and followed her up the narrow, winding stairs of the little house, and Elsie

met them on the landing.

"I have fancied him stirring, mother," she said, scarcely waiting to recognise their visitor. "This is a terrible thing, is it not? It looks as if some one attacked him out of pure maliciousness, since nothing he carried was touched, and so far as we knew he had not an enemy in the world."

Horne did not answer as he followed them into the room. His own fear was beginning to crystallise. He felt assured that Gilbert's was the hand that had dealt the blow. He was no stranger, of course, to the fact that the young men did not get on well together, and it was just possible that they might have met as Gilbert was returning home for his strange marauding visit and

had words upon the road.

But nobody could be certain until Humphrey should speak. He was lying fully dressed, as they had laid him, on the top of his bed, and they could do no more than look at him helplessly and wait until some further help should come. He looked peaceful enough, but so deathlike that Horne had to feel the pulse and the heart beat to assure himself that it was not death indeed. He turned away, his features working strangely.

"It's a horrible thing. Watson has gone for Meiklejohn, you say? I wonder how long it will be before

they can get back?"

"He lives in Drumsheugh Gardens. Dr. Watson thought that if he could catch him before he got out to his classes or to the hospital they would be back under an hour."

"Meanwhile there isn't anything I can do? I'll go on to the works, I think, and see what's what there."

"Go down with Mr. Horne, Elsie. I'll watch till they come back," said Mrs. Gerard, and Elsie silently

obeyed. They stood for a few moments in silence in the little square hall at the bottom of the stairs. Then Horne spoke.

"I may tell you, I suppose. Anyhow, it won't keep. Gilbert came home last night and broke into the house

in the ordinary burglar fashion."

Elsie stared in helpless incredulity.

"What was the meaning of it?" she asked bluntly.

"Was he drunk?"

"Oh, no," he answered with a slight smile. "Neither of my sons have given me any anxiety in that respect. Do you happen to know—did your brother ever suggest

to you that he and Gilbert had guarrelled?"

"They did not get on well together," she answered without a moment's hesitation. "But I am sure there had not been a quarrel—unless there happened to have been one yesterday," she added as an afterthought. "I did not see him after he left the house in the morning. I had walked into town in the afternoon and back, and went to bed early, as I was tired. Mother sat up for him."

"I can't make it out at all, but I'm nearly certain Gilbert has had something to do with it," he said

heavily.

"Don't trouble about it," she said bravely. "I am sure it will not be serious—that he will recover, and when he is able to speak he will tell us all we need to know."

She chose the words deliberately.

"He will tell us—or me, at least—all there is to tell," he replied sternly. "And if Gilbert really had a hand in this no consideration will be shown to him. It was a dastardly thing, and he shall pay for it even if he were my son ten times over."

Elsie said nothing. She had her own theory. Presently she mentioned the something which was in her

 \mathbf{mind}

"I am sure that Gilbert was jealous of him, and I must tell you Humphrey had a letter from Miss Inglis the other day—on Saturday it was. If Humphrey hap

pened to mention that, even casually to Gilbert, he would certainly flare up. There was nothing in the letter to trouble anybody, but still I thought it odd that she should write at all."

"I think so, too, certainly. What was it about?"

"Only asking him to get some books for a friend of hers who lives at Portobello; it was a commission which naturally she ought to have given to Gilbert."

"Naturally, but of late they did not get on. There was more in her reluctance not to make any decision about a house than ill-health; I thought that at the time." Elsie was silent. Horne turned towards the door.

"Well. I'll go on. Would you mind sending a message up to the house to be telephoned to Bonnygate immediately after Meiklejohn has been here?"

"I'll do that, of course. I'll walk across myself, and

tell you exactly what they say."

"Thank you." Horne walked slowly out to the door and turned his face eastwards, entirely forgetful of the fact that he had had no breakfast.

"I must go. You see," he remarked as he turned half way up the garden path, "I have an appointment with a man from Liège at ten o'clock. Good morning. I earnestly hope and pray that this day may close better

than it has begun."

It was only nine o'clock when he got to the works. and then a faint, exhausted feeling reminded him that he had not eaten. But there was no difficulty in getting some breakfast from the caretaker. While it was preparing, he sought out Bannerman, who was at once the oldest employee and the reliable friend.

"I'm wonderin' aboot Maister Gerard, sir, and what

for he's so late. Maist days we meet at the gate."

"Is he so early as that, Charlie? Surely there is

no need?"

"He's keen, sir; let him alane, it's the kind o' keenness that pays. An' he's no a jawer. He'll work quietly on, and maister everything while ither folk's speakin' aboot it."

Horne was struck by the shrewdness and the kindliness of the remark, which indicated the best of relationships existed between them.

"You like him, Charlie, I can see that."

"He's the richt sort, sir."

"And you are happier than you were in Mr. Gilbert's time?"

"Oh, much. Him an' me didna pu' in the same boat, sir. Things is better noo every way, if ye'll excuse me sayin' it, an' you'll be better served yoursel'."

"I know I am."

Horne now acquainted Bannerman with what had happened over night to Humphrey, much to the surprise and alarm of Charlie.

"Can you tell me," continued Horne after a pause, "anything about the relations existing between Mr.

Gilbert and Mr. Gerard?"

"They werena guid, sir. Last nicht jist afore Mr. Gilbert left they had a bit word."

Horne looked worried and anxious.

"Oh, it was naething, sir. Something about the keys bein' ta'en hame, but a feather shows hoo the wind blaws sometimes."

Struck by the expression on his master's face, he put

a blunt question.

"You're no thinkin' surely that Maister Gilbert had ony hand in this? I didna think there was onything as bitter as that—no, I'm sure o' it."

"I wish I could be as certain, Charlie," said Horne,

with a half sigh.

Only the careworn expression on his master's face deterred Bannerman from confiding in him the incident of the Portobello cottage, as suggested by his daughter Annie, and since verified by Gerard himself.

"I saw him last nicht, sir, atween nine and ten," he

said cautiously. "He ca'ed at my hoose."

"At your house?" interrupted the master rather quickly. "Surely that was a curious proceeding? Or was he in the habit of doing it?"

"Oh, no; he had never been there afore," replied Bannerman, a trifle confusedly. "It was something

special he wantit to see me aboot."

"I don't want to pry into your affairs, Bannerman," said Horne good-humouredly. "And surely I can trust you and him. I sincerely hope he is not seriously hurt. As soon as I've answered the more pressing of the letters, and seen Chapelle, I'll go back."

"Yes, sir."

Horne nodded, and at the moment the woman came to tell him his breakfast was ready. He sat down to it without relish, but felt better after he had eaten a few mouthfuls. The morning paper lay temptingly to hand, but he was in no mood to touch it, though by-and-bye, as he drank the last cup of coffee, he propped it up against the loaf, and ran his eye over the columns of the money market. Also he observed from the summary as he turned the page that there had been an exciting debate in the House the previous night on a question in which he was deeply interested. While he read he was disturbed by the roll of wheels on the roadway—a most unusual occurrence, as the heavy traffic did not come that way, and he had given orders concerning the brougham, meaning to telephone when he wanted it. At the moment the telephone bell rang, and he ran to answer it, expecting the message Elsie had promised from Burton Lea.

"Professor Meiklejohn has just gone," she said clearly. "And he is quite hopeful. He says there is no serious injury, and that he will certainly re-

cover consciousness very shortly."

Horne expressed his deep satisfaction, and said he would be out in the course of the forenoon. He had to break off with more suddenness than usual, for the sound of a most unexpected voice arrested him.

A carriage had stopped in the yard, and the next moment the door of the outer office opened to admit a most unusual visitor, his old friend, Lord Kilmartin, the

father of Mary Inglis.

CHAPTER XXXIV

TALKING IT OVER

"YOU look scared to see me," observed Lord Kilmartin drily. "It isn't anything very serious. Can I come in anywhere?"

"Yes, here, if you'll excuse the table. I've just had

my breakfast."

The law Lord looked round with some curiosity as he entered the comfortable room, where there was a bright fire and a spread table.

"Do you live here, Gibbie?" he asked quizzically.

"No, but I sometimes breakfast, and always lunch here," he answered, but there was no answering smile. He firmly believed that his anxieties concerning his second son were about to receive some heavy addition. No other object, he felt sure, could explain such an unusual visit.

"I wanted to see you, and as you are about as difficult to catch in business hours as I am, I thought I might find you before the day had actually begun. I'm a law to myself at present, so I had my breakfast and the brougham half an hour earlier, and took you on my way to the Courts."

"Yes," replied Horne still drily. "What do you

want?'

Lord Kilmartin unfastened his immaculate overcoat,

and drew an envelope from his pocket.

"A letter from Mary. It came last night. Its news is a little startling. She has broken the engagement."

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For a moment Horne's relief was so great that he could have smiled.

"I'm not surprised," was all he said. "Won't you

sit down, and let's talk things over?"

"It's warm in here," observed Kilmartin as he threw off his coat.

He was a very tall man with a clever, clean-shaven face, and a keen eye, which was known and feared on the Bench.

"So you're not surprised? I confess I was. I thought things were all right. Occasionally I thought Mary not particularly demonstrative on the head of it, but she's a queer girl, not to be judged from the ordinary standpoint. But my wife kept on assuring me everything was right, and her last letter contained no hint of it. In fact, it was all about that house at Colinton she wanted me to go and see, though it's too big. That's why I never came to consult you about it."

Horne stood leaning against the table in silence.

"What's wrong, Gibbie?" asked the law Lord after a moment of patient waiting for the explanation which did not come.

"I wish I knew, Bob," he answered. "I'm not surprised, and I'm glad that the initiative step comes from Mary."

"You look as if something were far wrong."

"So there is, but I tell you I can't lay my finger on it. Gilbert's off the straight line, been off it for a while now, and upon my word this comes as a sort of relief for your daughter's sake. I'm sorry to have to say it about my own son, but she's far too good for him."

Kilmartin stroked his chin thoughtfully, at the same time regarding his old friend with the same penetrating

keenness.

"You've positively no idea what has gone wrong? He doesn't drink?"

Horne shook his head.

"No, there's a woman in the case."

Kilmartin knit his brows, and the genial expression somewhat hardened.

"It sounds a bit curious. Some entanglement, I suppose, he had before the engagement, and which he can't get rid of. What fools these young men are! I'm thankful, for my girl's sake, that the breach has come now. It's-it's the sort of thing, of course, one doesn't specially want for one's girl."

His voice took a slight tremor, which betrayed the emotion beneath. It went to Horne's tender heart like

a knife.

"I'd have given my right hand, Bob, to prevent this, and I can only say I'm sorry that a lad of mine should have made the trouble. I—I know nothing, but I am afraid of a good many things. Again I must say how relieved I am that the initiative comes from Mary."

"She doesn't say much," said Kilmartin, as he took the letter from its cover and opened it out. "I don't mind your seeing it. In fact, I feel that you have a sort of right to read it."

He held it out, and Horne read the few lines it contained, his face working with the feelings he could not altogether control.

"HOTEL DE PALAIS, BIARRITZ, "10th April.

"DEAREST DAD,—I am writing again to-day, because there is something I want to tell you which I left out yesterday. I tried to tell you, but couldn't. But perhaps it is important enough to deserve a letter to itself.

"I have written to Gilbert, and broken our engagement. I can't very well explain all the reasons for this step, but I know you will believe that they are genuine enough, and that I have thought it well over first.

"I hoped you would guess that I had some such thing in my head before I left Edinburgh. I was a coward, or I would have done it then. I don't think Gilbert will be surprised, and I can only hope he will not feel it very much. Mamma is rather angry with me. If you think you could spare a few days, dearest, do come and help me. Somehow, I don't seem able to explain it to mamma's satisfaction. Biddy is as sweet as she can be, but we don't talk much about it. Please tell Mr. Horne when you see him that the biggest regret I have in the matter is that I shall not have him for a father-in-law. Do come, dearest, soon to your little

" MOLLY."

Horne passed back the letter in silence, and for a full

moment did not speak.

"I don't know what to say, Bob," he remarked at last. "In fact, there's nothing to say except that Gilbert has been a confounded fool for himself, and has lost a treasure that will never come in his way again."

"He hasn't said anything to you, I suppose?" asked Kilmartin, as he returned the letter to his pocket. "She doesn't say whenshe wrote the letter to Gilbert."

"It came last night, I fancy; at least, there was one lying on the hall table after the evening post. No, he has said nothing; in fact, I haven't seen him since."

He hesitated once more, because it was hard on his pride telling what had happened at Burton Lea the

previous night.

"He isn't here, I suppose? I'd see him, I think, now I am here, and get it over. I don't bear the lad any grudge, Gibbie, though sometimes I never seemed to get a grip of him, and, frankly, I liked Walter best."

"He isn't here. In fact, I have no more idea than you where he is at the present moment," replied Horne, then briefly put him in possession of the facts as they

had occurred.

Kilmartin, long accustomed to dealing with the sordid side of things, grasped them in their sequence with amazing readiness.

"There's something behind, as you say. If I had to

piece it out for judgment, I should say this, Gibbie. There's the entanglement, as you say. Gerard has discovered it; that, coupled with the jealousy your son has of this interloper—we must call him so in evidence—raised the very mischief in him. They had a few words, and Gilbert either defended himself or struck a blow. It's as plain as noonday. But he isn't seriously hurt, you say?"

"Meiklejohn has said so, and, of course, I am immensely relieved. I believe your view is the right one."

"I'm sure of it. Seeing him lying on the road, Gilbert probably thought he had killed him, and ran off to escape the consequences. It's a pity, but you'll keep it quiet, and don't let it get into the newspapers. I don't suppose the Gerards will bear you any grudge?"

"Oh, no. They are beyond reproach in that way, too much inclined to exaggerate the most commonplace

service."

"Then you can only wait until Gerard is able to give you the facts; then you must get Gilbert back."

"I feel as if I never wanted to see him again,"

observed Horne gloomily.

"Nonsense! There's nothing so very serious. Find out about the entanglement—cherchez la femme! wherever she is—and get the thing put on a clear basis, then we know where we are."

"I can only say how sorry I am that you should have been mixed up with such a thing, Lord Kilmartin."

"We're not mixed up," observed Kilmartin goodhumouredly. "The usual par in the newspaper, and the thing blows over before they get back. I'll see that it goes in to-day. I wish I could get away to Molly, but it's impossible. The first Easter I've been in Edinburgh for five years, but if I go I'll never be ready for the Lunan business, which will come on in earnest in May."

"Won't you take a cup of coffee or something?" asked Horne glancing vaguely at the table. He felt an

astonishing rush of gratitude towards his old friend for

the spirit in which he had taken the whole affair.

"No, thank you, and don't, for heaven's sake, look so glum, Gibbie. Is there anything now in the wide world really worth pulling such a long face over? Things right themselves: they always right themselves, only give them time."

"A cheery optimism," observed Horne with a smile. "But you don't happen to have a ne'er-do-weel in your

family."

"Not a ne'er-do-weel exactly, but you can hardly point to Bob as a shining light," he said with a small grimace. "I built hopes on that boy, and now he's calling the cattle home, as Mary sings. I don't like it. No. how could I? But I've got to endure it."

Involuntarily Horne held out his hand.

"Bob, I've often misjudged you. Let bygones be bygones."

"Right you are. I knew exactly how you've felt about things, and I blamed my wife. After all, we've got to order our lives—our home lives, I mean—entirely on the lines the women ordain. My wife is full of this Edinburgh pride and exclusiveness. It's become part of her very being. I've got to suffer, though I'm a Bohemian at heart. I'm happy in my work, and Molly's the recompense. I'll have to write to them both, for I won't have the child worried, and if she's going to be worried I'll let the Lunan case go to the wall, and go and fetch her home."

Horne nodded, and Kilmartin began to move towards

the door.

"You've no idea, I suppose, what is at the back of the business-Gilbert's business, I mean?" he said thoughtfully.

"Not the faintest. I was always hoping to get some

light on it."

"And he's gone away. Do you think he meant going abroad or what?"

"I tell you I don't know. You have the facts just as I told them. He broke into the house last night, like a first-class burglar, made a raid on the larder, and took away some clothes. I'll find out presently about the money."

"You'll keep it quiet anyhow, for all our sakes. We don't want anything to get into the newspapers. They're perfect sharks, but we must circumvent them

if possible."

"Right you are," said Horne with great heartiness.

They walked together to the brougham, and stood a moment in silence before Kilmartin got in.

"Don't lay it too much to heart, Gibbie," said the old man kindly. "I don't like to see that long face,

man, it isn't natural to you."

In spite of himself Horne smiled. "I suppose I do take things too seriously," he admitted. "I'll try and remember it's all in the day's work."

So they shook hands and parted, Horne returning to

his work with a better heart.

CHAPTER XXXV

CLEARING UP

GERARD was longer of returning to consciousness than any of them expected. A week passed away, and he still lay like a log there, prone on his back,

oblivious of everything passing around him.

Nothing could be done, they said, except to wait until nature did her work. But it was a dreadful experience for them all. Never had there been such an interminable week. Before it ended, Horne received a note from Lord Kilmartin, saying he was off to Biarritz, which indicated that matters were not going very well there. Biddy had not written, and there was nothing

to do, except await the development of events.

Nothing either had been heard of Gilbert, and though Horne had put some watcher on the track they had not even discovered by what train he had left the city. Altogether that was a strange, uncomfortable week, full of mystery and darkness. Every day Horne called at the Cleugh Cottage, spending there, indeed, a large part of the time he should have given to Bonnygate. On the eighth day, when he arrived at the gate driving, for a wonder Elsie was watching for him, and he knew from the expression on her face there was some improvement.

"He's conscious," she said quickly. "In the middle of the night he opened his eyes and spoke to mother."

"Thank God! And what is he like now?"

"Drowsy and dazed and rather weak, but I think

he's going to be all right," she answered, and a bright tear started in her eye, and stood there like a single diamond.

"You've been very brave," said Horne, and was

unable to keep the tenderness out of his voice.

"Every one has been so kind," she murmured unsteadily. "But I know now how dreadful it would have been for us had Humphrey been taken away. Why are you driving to-day?"

"Well, my dear, I can hardly tell you. Perhaps I feel at last that I'm getting old. This has taken it out

of me."

"Old! No, indeed!" she cried indignantly. "You don't look old; you are not old, so please never say that again. Any word from Biddy this morning?"

He shook his head.

"We shall have a telegram presently announcing that they're on the way home. Lord Kilmartin left last night."

"To fetch them home, do you mean?"

"I am supposing so. His letters can't have been satisfactory either. He fears, I believe, that his wife may be making it uncomfortable for Mary."

"About the broken engagement?"

"Yes. Hullo, there's Walter. I thought he'd gone. I can drive him in. We're all at sixes and sevens at Burton Lea in these days; each man a law to himself.

We're badly needing Biddy to pull us together."

Had they been near enough they must have observed the indefinable change in Walter's face when he saw them together. By the time he had reached the gate, however, he had recovered himself, and appeared placid as usual.

"Humphrey is better," said his father briefly. "He has recovered consciousness. I suppose you'll be uneasy now waiting for the doctor, Elsie?" he added. "I can telephone to him if you like, telling him to get out as quickly as possible."

"Oh, thank you. I'm sure that would relieve mother," said Elsie gratefully. They bade her "good morning" and got into the brougham. As she turned to re-enter the house her eyes fell on a clump of blown violets under the hedge, from which she had intended to offer Mr. Horne a buttonhole.

"I'll give it to him to-night, so, little flowers, you can go on growing all day," she whispered as she passed.

Horne and his son had not very much to say to one

another as they drove.

"We'll perhaps hear the true ins and outs of the story now," observed the old man as he let down one of the windows with rather a hasty hand as if he felt the need of more air. "It has been a bad week and has told on these poor women."

"Do you think so, sir? Miss Gerard, at least, looks

very well."

"She bears up. She has the courage and the endurance of twice her age. She may be a girl in looks, but she has all a woman's power."

Walter made no response.

"I suppose you've developed no fresh theory about

Gilbert?" suggested his father next.

"There's only one, sir-cherchez la femme!" replied Walter briefly, with a faintly curling lip. "It holds good in the majority of cases," he added as an afterthought.

"Walter," said his father, with startling suddenness, "has it ever occurred to you that I might marry

again?" "No, sir. I can't say I have ever thought of it. I always fancied Biddy in the way, and I have heard you say a man with a grown-up daughter or daughters had no need to marry.

Horne grimly smiled.

"That holds good so long as there is no temptation. I suppose that is the right word to use. You'll be surprised to hear that I am contemplating it, and that perhaps in a disastrous direction, since the old man who marries a young wife is an old fool. It is Elsie Gerard."

Walter turned his head sharply away, a significant

gesture which could not be lost upon his father.

"You don't like the idea of it, boy. I thought you would be the least affected member of the family."

There was a moment of rather trying silence.

"I suppose it is chiefly on your sister's account you feel? You think that were I to marry one who is near of an age with her the position would be intolerable? But somehow I don't fancy Biddy would take it that way. She is not built after the fashion of other women."

Štill silence

"You don't approve the idea?" observed Horne, with a slight bitterness of tone. "You hold the common theory, I suppose, that there's no fool like an old one? Well, I suppose you're right. I shall be fifty-four my next birthday."

"I was not thinking of that, sir," replied Walter rather coldly. "You have a right, of course, to please

yourself."

"I am perfectly aware of that," answered Horne dryly. "But it's cold comfort, I tell you, Walter. The man who has the misfortune to lose his wife, the mother of his children, when they are all young, is to be pitied, how deeply nobody knows except the one who has had to endure the peculiar loneliness of the widowed life."

"The remedy would seem to be to marry after a reasonable period," observed Walter somewhat heavily.

"Certainly before the children are grown up."

. "Supposing I were to propose to Miss Gerard—I have not done so, remember, or even seriously faced it—but supposing I did, and were accepted, which I have not the smallest reason for expecting, it is on Biddy's account you would feel it? It can't possibly

affect you. We see so little of you in the house, and in a few years' time you will be away altogether. This is inevitable."

"Yes, I must admit, sir, that I was not thinking about Biddy. I believe, as you say, that she will probably take it quite well."

"Then who or what are you thinking of?" inquired Horne, with a faintly perceptible tinge of impatience in his voice. "I have spoken to you, though I must admit it has been on the spur of the moment, with extreme frankness, and I can't say why I have done so. Perhaps you will state your objections with an equal frankness. Then we shall know where we are. If I can be convinced that any such step on my part would really make my children unhappy-the two who are left to me, at least-I am prepared to abandon it. Miss Gerard, I repeat, has not the faintest idea that I have ever entertained the thought."

Again Walter was silent, looking through the farther window of the brougham across the fields whereon lay

the smiling sun of spring.

A struggle was going on within. To a man of his natural reserve it was a very sharp one. But in Walter Horne the sense of duty was stronger than any personal inclination, so presently he spoke. He turned to his father.

"You are certainly entitled to a corresponding frankness on my part. I assure you, first, that I should be glad to see you happier than you are, and if happiness

lies in that direction I shall welcome it for you.'

There was a slight formality in his speech, inevitably consequent on the strain of the moment. An expression of relief dawned on his father's face, but the next words

converted it into one of dismay.

"I will not be behindhand in frankness," added Walter in rather a rueful voice. "I may as well confess that lately I have had hopes in that direction myself."

Horne was silent for one complete moment, the silence

of an absolute dismay.

"You surprise me," he faltered at last. "Why, you are the very last, and I thought you were wedded to your books and studies. And your position as it is now would mean years of waiting. If you contemplated matrimony, lad, you would have been better advised to stick to Bonnygate."

Walter shook his head.

"I did not contemplate it when I made the change, sir," he admitted. "But so far as I am concerned the matter is off from this moment."

Horne turned to him.

"But why? The argument is absurd. Of course, if you are in the running I shall retire. It is a heavenly mercy we had this conversation, entirely unpremeditated on my part. It has certainly prevented us making utter fools of ourselves. If you can win her I shall be the first to congratulate you. It's a ghastly comedy though, and shows me in my true light, an old fool after all, Walter. What chance has a father against a son in such a matter as this? None at all."

"Sir, I am willing to stand by," he said a trifle shame-facedly. "As you suggest, I am in no position at present. And I daresay I'll get over it. I'll stick in to my studies a bit harder than I have done of late. And, if you don't mind, I'll take rooms in town. I've felt it a bit of a fag to go in and out this spring. It takes too

large a slice off my working day."

"As you please, Walter. But you may believe that so far as I am concerned Miss Gerard will never know now. The grotesqueness of the situation has proved to me my own unspeakable folly. Rivals! By heavens! it won't bear thinking of; it's quite Gilbertian. Pray forget what I have said, Walter, and if you should be so fortunate as to win the sweet girl, no one will wish you luck more heartily than your old dad."

"I'll get down here and cut across," observed Walter,

and drew the arresting cord. Horne understood, and did not seek to detain him. Walter stepped out to the road, and when he had closed the door offered his hand through the window. It was instantly grasped in a firm, warm grip.

"We're a nice lot! If you'd reared us for the purpose we could hardly have wounded you more," he said. "I wish to heaven I'd kept my tongue between my

teeth."

Horne nodded, and they parted in no way estranged. Horne felt the bitterness of the moment extremely and acutely. He was glad to be alone. So far as he was concerned, acutely sensitive regarding his own age for one thing, he had given up hope. And he was generous enough to appreciate fully the frankness with which Walter had met him. The rest of the drive to Bonnygate was spent in trying to picture the woman he loved in a new relation to him, that of his son's wife.

Fortunately at Bonnygate there were many urgent and engrossing matters awaiting his attention, and for a few hours he had no time to think of anything else. About one o'clock he turned in as usual for a bite of luncheon, and was struck by the fact that once more he was as absolutely alone in the offices as he had been at

the beginning of things.

He was still pondering on the strange working of destiny, when one of the lads brought him a message.

"A lady to see you, sir, in the little office."

"A lady? What name?"

"Wouldn't give any, sir, but said her business was important, and that she can wait until you are ready."

"All right. I'll be there presently."

He finished his bread and cheese, washed his hands, and passed along the passage to the little room where callers were usually put.

CHAPTER XXXVI

MRS. GILBERT

HORNE was conscious of a distinct curiosity as he opened the door of the inner room. A lady stood somewhat timidly, it seemed to him, midway between the fireplace and the window, looking anxiously towards the door.

She was quite young, dressed with extreme simplicity and care. Her face was a little pale, and his quick eye detected signs of nervousness in the tremor of the lids above the big, child-like eyes.

"Good morning, madam," he said in his kindest manner. "Please sit down and tell me what I can do

for you."

She did not speak for a moment, but continued to look at him as if seeking to discover what kind of treatment she was likely to receive at his hands.

"You do not know me, sir?" she said, with a little

catch in her voice.

"No, I have not to my knowledge seen you before."

"My name was Morison," she answered clearly-

"but I am your son Gilbert's wife."

Horne staggered back a step. He was not surprised at the mention of Gilbert's name, but the quiet assertion, so convincingly made, put a new aspect upon affairs. If it were true, then Gilbert was a greater scoundrel than he had thought. But Horne did not believe it to be true, and in his eyes a vast pity lay.

"Won't you sit down?" he said gently. "And we will go into this thing. It is a surprise to me certainly in one way. In another, nothing concerning my son

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Gilbert could surprise me. He has drifted completely away from me."

She opened the little velvet bag that was suspended

at her waist and took out an envelope.

"I got this yesterday morning. I thought about it

all day, and now I have come to show it to you."

Horne took the letter from her hand a little reluctantly.

"You wish me to read it?"

"Yes, I brought it for the purpose."

He drew it from its cover, and quickly ran his eyes over these lines :--"S.S. Catania.

"Off QUEENSTOWN, 23rd April.

"DEAR LILY,—When you get this you will understand probably what has happened; I've cleared out. For a while things have been pretty intolerable at home, and had reached a crisis. Probably when you get this you may know that something happened the last night I saw you. After I got back to Cramond I met that sneak Gerard spying out for me, and I gave him what

for.

"I don't know whether I did for him or not; at any rate, he's the sort of chap that would make a fine row about a small matter. It would just serve his own ends, which is to feather his nest out of the governor. I've never known him so soft as he has been about this outsider. He never was so easy on his own sons. But I needn't expatiate on that. I don't know my ultimate destination. I am sorry for you, my poor girl. As I said the other night, what a ghastly mistake we have made. Of course, the marriage business was all a hoax. I thought you would have seen through it long ago. I own up that I've behaved like a scoundrel to you, but it's a very human weakness that has been going on ever since the world began. I don't suppose we'll ever meet again. You'd better try and go back home. I send you all I possess in the world at the present moment—a hundred pounds. If you should think you can't go back to your own people—though, honestly, dear, it's the very best thing you could do, especially when that aunt of yours is such a good sort—you could ask my father to do something for you. He won't refuse, because he's always generous to outsiders, and because he'll never have to do any more for me. If it could have been managed I would have taken you, but I thought it out, and concluded that it would be quite disastrous.

"Try and forget me, Lily. I'm a wrong 'un, and always had a twist in me somewhere, I suppose. Thank you, my dear, for the sweetness you put into my life for a while, and try and not think too hardly of me.—Yours devotedly. "Gilbert Horne."

As Horne read his face grew white and then red with the tempest in his soul. That his own flesh and blood should write such a cowardly letter to the woman he had betrayed filled him with amazement and a fury of indignation. He would have thrown it in the fire, but she reached out her hand in time to save it.

"It's mine," she said quietly. "You're very angry,

I can see, angrier even than I was when I got it."

"Sit down," he said quickly, "and tell me how in heaven's name you ever came to take up with him. Remember, I am all in the dark. Who were you before this happened? Who are your people? Are they in Edinburgh?"

"Yes, my father's name is Morison—Edward Morison. He's a teacher in a school out at Merchiston;

perhaps you know it-Laurie's Institution."

"I know the school, of course, and the headmaster, Smeaton. Where did you meet my son first?"

Lily faintly coloured, and looked down.

"We met first on the Blackford Hill. My hat blew away in the wind one day I was there, and he picked it up for me. We began to talk, and so it went on."

"My son promised you marriage, I suppose. Are

you still in your father's house?"

"No; I am in rooms at Portobello. I've been there since before Christmas."

A great light dawned on Horne's mind.

There was the full explanations of Gilbert's absences from home, his late nights, his lack of lover-like attendance in that quarter where they had a right to expect it.

Lily's colour flamed in her cheek, and involuntarily

she drew herself up.

"Sir, I am your son's wife," she said, simply.

He shook his head pityingly.

"He did not seem to think it when he wrote that letter. It is not the kind of letter a man would write to the woman he believes to be his wife."

She undid the bosom of her dress, and drew out another envelope, from which she produced a blue

paper and offered it to him.

"That's my marriage lines. I got them at the time. He thought they were false; he was wrong, for I've had the very best advice, and the lawyer tells me I'm his wife, according to what they call Scots law."

"Did you go to a registry office, or what?"

"No: we were married in a house. I don't know where the house is, nor the people, but they witnessed it, and some time ago, when I thought he had rued." she added, with a quiet pathos which stung Horne again, "I consulted a lawyer, and he told me that this document is valid. That was the words he used. I can give you his name if you like-Mr. Andrew Haliburton, 35 York Place."

Horne studied the document he held in his hand intently for a few moments, then handed it back to her.

"We'll have advice upon it, the very best advice that can be got; but I believe you are right. Anyhow, you shall have your rights. If my son refuses them, his father won't."

"Thank you, Mr. Horne; I expected as much, for I have always heard of you as a good man, kind and just.

That gave me courage to come."

The words struck Horne, nay, smote him with a two-

edged sword.

Coming from such a quarter from the outside, it showed him what responsibility was his, and how the world looked on, to discover whether he lived up to the reputation he professed.

"Will you tell me, my dear," he said, with extreme gentleness, "how you ever came to make this fatal mistake, the very worst surely a woman can make, since it

means that she sacrifices all?"

"I—I cared about him, and I believed him," she answered, but reluctantly, as if the words were wrung from her.

"But if you had waited you would have proved whether he really cared or not. You need not have made yourself so cheap. You belong to respectable folks. I may have been hard on my sons—they seem to think so; but, as God is my witness, I never would have turned my back on any respectable woman either of them wanted to marry. If he had brought you to Burton Lea you would have had your welcome. I seem to have failed somewhere. I have never had my sons' confidence. Perhaps I have been to blame, too."

"Don't say that," cried Lily, quickly. "I don't like to hear it. And I shall never, never forget your kindness to me. I don't want anything from you, Mr. Horne, only to have my father and sister know that it is all right. If you will tell them, they will believe it.

Then I can work for myself."

"No," said Horne, bringing his fist down with a bang on the table. "No, by heaven; the man who takes a wife must work for her—it's the law of heaven. Gilbert must be found, and compelled to do his duty by you. The world is not so very wide, nor America so very far away. He shall be found."

Lily smiled faintly, but shook her head.

"I am not sure whether I want him brought back on these terms," she said. "All I want is to be made right with my own people." Horne was silent a moment.

"Are you aware that up to a few days ago Gilbert was engaged to Miss Inglis, the only daughter of Lord Kilmartin, that she was getting ready for the wedding, and that they had only to find a house, when she returned from abroad?"

"Yes," she answered clearly. "I know all that."

"Was he engaged when you met first?"

"I don't know."

"The engagement has, happily for everybody concerned, been broken by Miss Inglis herself. The letter containing her decision arrived at Burton Lea the very night Gilbert left the house and the town. I daresay it helped to hasten his departure."

Lily made no reply. Her errand accomplished, the strain of the moment over, she was at a loss. And she had gone very white, as if it had been too much for her.

"Sit down, and I'll bring you something to drink," said Horne, very kindly, as he pushed round the easy

chair.

She shook her head.

"I will not stay. Will you see or write to my father? I am afraid to go back until he has been told. My father is a hard man, Mr. Horne, and this is a thing he would never forgive."

"Your mother is dead, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; she died when we were quite little. We have had no one to guide us," she answered, simply.

"Where are you staying at Portobello?"

"At the house of Miss Fiddes, Rosearbour, on the road to Joppa."

"Well, my dear, you will go back there now, pack

your box, and come to Burton Lea this afternoon. Lily's face flushed all over, then the colour receded

and left it as pale as death.

"I could not do that, believe me. I don't want to push myself into your family. I only want to be made right with my own."

"You shall be made right with them, but it must be in my way, not yours. You will come to Burton Lea, I say, this afternoon, where you will be received as my son's wife, and after you are there I will see your father."

Her eyes filled with sudden tears.

"Sir, I never expected this, and I repeat I don't want

to be a trouble to you or anybody."

"It is not a question of that, my woman," said Horne, bringing his fist down again. "It is a question of right and wrong, of justice being done. To Burton Lea you shall come, and stop there till we find Gilbert. And if he is never found, then I shall charge myself with your future. That is not special kindness or generosity: it

is a simple and plain duty."

Lily Morison rose and stood before him with her head high in the air, a new expression on her face. Never had it been so sweet, or had she borne herself with such a fine dignity. Horne admired her exceedingly, and the relief he experienced at finding the reality so much less humiliating than he had at one time expected coloured his whole outlook.

She took all the papers from her bag again, and

offered them to him.

"Take these and go to Mr. Haliburton," she said. "I want you to make sure that everything is as I say. If you are satisfied when you have made the fullest inquiries, I will come to Burton Lea if you still wish it. But it is not the treatment I deserve, for I have been a wicked woman, too, to bring all this trouble upon my own family and on yours. If I could undo it, I would."

"I believe you, my dear. But perhaps even yet we may be able to gather up the ragged ends and patch the thing decently. I've no doubt you've had your share of

He did not add what he sincerely believed—that her future with a man who had behaved so dastardly towards her was not particularly alluring or bright.

CHAPTER XXXVII

LOVE IN THE KITCHEN

THEY talked for some time together, and when Lily left Bonnygate Works at last Horne was in full possession of all the facts relating to the past nine months. The longer he talked with her the more he was convinced of her sincerity. She had been well and strictly brought up, and her heart was heavy with the weight of remorse for the way in which she had behaved.

There was nothing forward or presuming about her, nor did she betray the faintest desire to push herself upon her husband's family. Again and again she reiterated her desire only to be made right with her own people, and in the eyes of those whom she had hurt and

humiliated.

What he could not make out was whether she still cared for Gilbert. She was very guarded in what she said of him, and Horne was too tactful a man to push

the question to its issue.

What he was determined was that Gilbert should be found and compelled to do justice to the girl whose life he had taken and marred. His impatience for this fulfilment of justice was so great that he would have been imprudent in his methods to bring it about. It was Lily who restrained him, and who counselled no haste. "I'm all right at Miss Fiddes's house yet," she ex-

plained. "She will not wonder though I should be another month without hearing anything from Gilbert.

There is no hurry, and your people would not like it,"

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she added falteringly, thinking of Biddy, with her clear eye and her proud, fearless head. She could imagine

her severe upon offenders when occasion arose.

"I am the master of my own house," he replied grimly. "And I say that your place is there until he comes back. I will set people on his track to-day or tomorrow, and when he arrives in New York there will be a little billet-doux awaiting him."

"But you will see Mr. Haliburton first?"

"I will go there to-day, and I will come and see you this evening. I may see your father this afternoon, too," said Horne. "So that is the programme. You are going now? Very well; I need not say I am sorry for what has happened. You did wrong—yes, I grant that—but you are not the first woman who has believed in a man's word to her own undoing. I am sorry that any son of mine should be to blame. But, look you, for us it might have been worse. There is relief as well as concern in my mind at this moment."

He saw that she needed a word of hope. In some things he had a woman's tenderness and intuition, and Lily Morison left the works with such a glow of passionate gratitude in her heart towards him that she could not have expressed in words. Her feet seemed to tread on air as she went back by the way she had come. She tried to picture the interview that would take place between her father and Horne, and a curious thrill passed

over her.

But it was of Jean she thought with a yearning love, her own sister, from whom she had never been separated for more than a day or two till she had made the black

gulf with her own hands.

Naturally Horne was preoccupied at his business that day, and he left it before three o'clock. He drove up to York Place, then sent the brougham home. He was closeted with the lawyer there for nearly an hour, and when he came out his face wore a set resolve.

He had not forgotten to obtain from his new daughter-

in-law her father's address, and about four o'clock he went up the steep slope of Ardmillan Street and rang the Morison bell. The door was drawn up at once, and he ascended the stairs, to be received at the landing by Jean, looking very dainty and eager, expecting her

own lover to come to tea. All was settled between them now, and Jean Morison had passed into that new world which is the old. She was no longer the same woman, each day Morison was amazed at some fresh development of her powers. He often sighed, thinking how happy they might have been had some such experience come to Lily. And very often, nay always, he blamed himself.

"My name is Horne," said the strange gentleman.

"Is Mr. Morison at home?"

"No, but I am expecting him every moment. Will you come in and wait?"

"Every moment," repeated Horne. "He would be

in within the next ten minutes or so?"

"Most certainly. He is never later than a quarter or half-past four," Jean assured him, and held open

the door invitingly.

He thanked her and stepped in. The little hall was not a cheerful place; it took him a moment or so to get his eyes accustomed to the gloom so that he saw where to place his hat.

Jean hastened to the sitting-room door and set it

wide open.

Horne passed within, and seeing the table laid for tea would have drawn back.

"Can't I wait somewhere else? I shall be interfering

with your meal."

"Oh, no, it is our only sitting-room, sir, and there is no hurry. The table is laid because my father likes to see it when he comes in. He is always very tired."

Horne nodded and thanked her. She stirred the fire a little and withdrew, shutting the door quietly behind

her.

Horne glanced round the room. It was homely, but comfortable, and there were one or two good etchings on the walls. But books furnished it chiefly. There were shelves running round two sides of it, full to the ceiling. Horne proceeded to examine them with a very genuine interest through his pince-nez. He heard the bell ring and stepped back, but it was not Morison, only Jean's lover, who with a smile and a finger on the lip, was invited to come into the kitchen.

"There's a visitor for father in the parlour," she ex-

plained, in a whisper. "Where is he?"

"Haggling with old Jimmy Burns in the bookshop at the corner for an old copy of Hazlitt. If we get him on this side of five we'll do," replied Smeaton, sitting down on the table, and proceeding to criticise Jean from top to toe. They were a delightful pair, like children, finding out some fresh joy in one another every day. They were a little shy yet, but making wonderful strides in the art of love-making. Presently Jean sat down on the table, too, and they were in no hurry for the father's key in the door.

The kettle was singing to them, and the big cat blinking at them from the end of the polished fender.

"Look here, Jeanie." Nobody had ever called her Jeanie before, and it sounded like the sweetest music in her ears. "I've made up my mind, July the 25th, day after the school breaks up, and we'll be at Grindelwald a week later."

She blushed rosy red all over her face, and shook her

"There's no hurry."

"Yes, there is; look at all the years I've been cheated. You are young, lass, and needn't mind, but look at me and my grey hairs."

"There's no grey," she said indignantly. "Not a

single hair."

"Yes, there is, and it's getting seldom on the top, too, Jeanie. It's an old man you're getting, lass; more's the pity. I can't afford to wait, you see, in case you take the rue."

She shook her head.

"Don't talk such terrible nonsense."

"I will, unless you promise for the twenty-fifth of July."

"What about father?"

"Well, he'll be lonely, but we'll make a tryst to meet him in Switzerland after a week or two. We might have the last fortnight together in fact. I've spoken to him, Jeanie, and he didn't say no."

"Did you tell him you wanted to get married in July?" "Yes, of course, and he agreed with me that there

was no time to lose."

Jean rose, and stepped across to remove the boiling

kettle from the top of the stove.

"I can't believe it. Three months' time! Are you sure it'll be all right?"

"What?"

"That you won't see somebody else you would like

better."

"Well, considering how old I am, and how many women I have seen, and that you're the only one I've met that made me willing to give up my freedom, I think the question is superfluous, madam."

"I've got to get providing."

"Oh, your Auntie Bell can provide providing at a moment's notice."

Jean laughed. "Seriously though, John, I don't know what father

will do."

"What he ought to do is to go and live with Auntie Bell, and a jolly lucky man he would be to get the privilege."

Jean shook her head.

"That would never do. Auntie Bell's a splendid woman, but she and father have never agreed. They are both too nippy in the tongue-to each other, I mean—and he would never give up his books. There would be no room for them in Auntie Bell's. Her place is chokeful of the biggest furniture you ever saw in your life."

"I know," said Smeaton discreetly. "I've been

there."

"What do you think about father?" she asked as she leaned her head on his shoulder. "He's so gentle and kind to me now I feel as if I could never do enough for him."

"We'll take him, if you like, Jeanie. I'd be glad of it, and the house I have in my mind's eye would be big enough for us all. We'd let him take all his books, and give him his own snuggery to put them in. Then if he didn't want to be beside us he could retire to his king-

dom like. How would that do?"

The tears sprang bright and warm in Jean's eyes, and she turned away to hide them. But Smeaton drew her to him, and demanded to know their cause in that grand domineering but entirely tender manner which was her secret glory. To be cared for like this, to have her very expression studied, her slightest wish respected, was not only a wonderful, it was a humbling thing. It had brought to the surface all thought of undreamed-of womanly qualities in Jean Morison.

"That doesn't please you either?"

"It's what I would like," she whispered back. "But it wouldn't be fair to you, John. You are entitled to

have your home to yourself."

"But we're such very good friends; we understand one another," Smeaton assured her. "Your father is a man that can efface himself, if necessary. See what liberty he gives us in these days."

"There he is, I believe," she said listening with up-

lifted hand

She looked so sweet at the moment, with the colour high in her cheek and the tender light still in her eyes, that Smeaton ventured upon a kiss.

"Thank you for all your goodness. If you really think we could take father I'll-I'll make it up to you," she whispered with a passionate note in her voice.

"All right, my lady. I'll have that in black and white," he said significantly. "Is that the old man?

Who's the gentleman wanting him?"

"He gave the name of Horne."

"Horne! I know a Horne, Bonnygate Works. He has some shares in the school."

Jean nodded and ran out to the door, hearing her father's key, to tell him a gentleman waited for him in the parlour.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE AMAZING TRUTH

MORISON hung up his hat and entered the parlour with a look of expectant surprise on his face. Visitors to the little flat were very few, the advent of a new one so rare an occurrence as to occasion much speculation. Horne turned from his contemplation of the books at the opening of the door, and the two men faced each other.

"Good afternoon," said Horne. "You don't know me?"

"No, sir, I do not."

Horne regarded him keenly, and arrived at a very fair estimate of the man. The well-worn frockcoat, the somewhat old-fashioned peak collar, and neat black silk bow, the prim scholastic air were all very characteristic. It was a good strong face, the high brow indicating intellectual gifts which perhaps had never found their proper channel in which to flow freely.

"My name is Horne-Gilbert Horne, of the Bonny-

gate Works, and Burton Lea, Cramond."

"I know you now, sir, of course; your name is well

known in Edinburgh."

"So it is; perhaps that is a doubtful advantage at times, Mr. Morison," said Horne with a somewhat ironical smile. "Well, the errand upon which I have come is not a pleasant one. We'd better get the business over as quickly as possible."

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Morison looked apprehensive, but did not open his mouth.

The next words, however, caused the grey colour on

his face to melt into a sudden shamed crimson.

"I understand that you have two daughters, Mr. Morison, and that one of them left you some months

ago under suspicious circumstances."

"She left of her own free will, and without leaving a word as to her meaning or whereabouts, on the nineteenth of December last," said Morison when he could command his voice.

"And you have heard nothing of her since?"

"Nothing direct. She has been to see her aunt in the interval, but we are no wiser about her," answered Morison, and Horne observed that the hand stretched

out to grip the table trembled.

"I have learned to-day that she is the wife of my second son, Gilbert," he said steadily. "So that is the solution of the mystery, which, I daresay, has occasioned you a good deal of needless pain. It is the price we pay when we give such hostages a fortune."

Morison looked as if he had not heard aright.

"His wife?" he faltered. "Lily your son's wife?"
"Yes; but, look you, the rascal does not believe that
she is his wife. Though he is my son, I don't believe
he ever intended that she should be," said Horne, as if
he took a delight in getting the worst out without varnish. "The love affair went on for awhile, and then
he took her away after going through what he believed
to be a false marriage, which was a binding ceremony.
I have a scoundrel for my son, Mr. Morison, and I have
come here to tell you so."

Morison was unable to speak for a moment, and when he did his voice sounded thick and strange in his

own ears.

"How or where did you learn all this?" he managed to ask at last.

"I have seen your daughter to-day; but, first, I must

go back a bit," said Horne grimly. "My son has been engaged for twelve months to Miss Inglis, the daughter of Lord Kilmartin, one of the Judges. I daresay you know his name. Whether he was engaged at the time when he met your daughter first I don't know."

"I can't enlighten you, Mr. Horne, for, look you, I was in ignorance that anything unusual was going on. When she left it was a knock-down blow. Her sister knew a little, but not enough to give us the slightest clue. She knew only that somebody had been coming here to see her when we were both out. And when she

ran away we were totally in the dark."

"I believe you, Mr. Morison. Don't for a moment think that I have attributed any complicity to you. Matters got very strained at the last as the preparations for the other marriage went forward. It was arranged even that he and Miss Inglis were to be married in June. But other things happened in the interval, and I am glad to tell you that Miss Inglis, writing from the South of France, has broken the engagement before she heard anything of this. It was a great relief to me and will be to her when she knows. I suppose she will have to be told what has really happened."

"It is an extraordinary and unbelievable story,"

observed Morison. "But where is Lily?"

"Lily by this time, I hope, is where she should be—at Burton Lea."

"At your house?" faltered Morison. "Then you

will countenance her?"

"Man, I must do, she is a respectable woman, and, so far as I was able to judge when I saw her to-day, one of whom nobody need be ashamed. The shame is all on my side."

"No," said Morison sharply. "It is we who must feel the shame. My daughter did wrong, bitter wrong, and if she has suffered or must suffer, it is only her due."

"Oh, she has suffered, and will suffer, Mr. Morison. She's not through yet," observed Horne curtly. "And

there is no doubt whatever that when she left home she believed herself to be his wife. You may rest on that, and take what comfort you can from it. She remained true in principle at least to the upbringing she has had here."

"Upbringing!" repeated Morison, wearily. "She's had none. Her mother died when she was a little bairn, and what do men folk know of the ways of

lassies?"

"I am in the same boat, Mr. Morison, for my wife died when Gilbert was a baby. The same thing holds good, I guess, where the lads are concerned, and it may be that I have been so busy getting rich that I've neglected the duty lying nearest. I am bitterly repaid this day."

He walked to the window and stood for a moment looking out upon the dull street, as if his feelings had

got the mastery of him.

"What does your son say to it now? Is he at Burton Lea too?" inquired Morison, who was eager

naturally to hear all the details.

"Not he; he's run away, turned his back on the whole kettle of fish, as the coward does," said Horne, with swift scorn, as he turned on his heel again. "That's what brought matters to a crisis. After knocking down and half killing a man who he imagined was prying into his affairs, he cleared out after breaking into his father's house like a professional burglar. He's off to America; he wrote to your daughter on the ship between Liverpool and Queenstown, and she brought the letter to me this morning. That's where we are now, Mr. Morison—that's the bright and shining light I have in my second son."

"Then Lily must come back here," said Morison, firmly; and at once. "Where is she, did you say? I'll

go with you and fetch her back."

"Not just yet," said Horne, calmly. "She must stay where she is at Burton Lea until I make some

arrangements. That at least is due to you and yours. I will act fair and square by her, and try and repair as far as lies in my power the wrong that has been done. We'll get a hold of him yet, though I must say she does not seem to be so keen about that as that her position shall be made clear to you. She wants to be put right with her own people; that's how she expressed it more than once this morning."

"I must see her," said Morison, and his mouth

quivered. "I must see her to-day."

"Granted. I'll send her up to you this evening in the carriage—no, I must be permitted to have my own way in this. I intend to show my son how a man should behave. And whether he comes back or not, I will make myself chargeable for her future."

Morison was unable to speak. After a moment's

intense strain he held out a shaking hand.

"Sir, you are a good man; God bless you; I can only regret that a daughter of mine should have given you so much trouble and pain."

"He is to blame, I tell you," repeated Horne, insistently. "I don't understand it, for she's a girl nobody need be ashamed of. I must have failed somehow, surely, and that sadly, if he felt that he was afraid to introduce her to me as the woman he wanted to make his wife. This pride, my God! it makes me sick, and T want to go back to the cottage in the Canonmills. where my mother did her own work, and was ashamed of nothing except debt and evil speech."

Morison answered nothing. He was cast in a different mould. Thought moved in slow grooves with him, and words were always few. But the relief of his

soul was expressed on his face.

"Well, I won't keep you," said Horne, turning towards the door. "We understand one another. You shall see your daughter, yes, this very evening, but only on condition that she comes back to Burton Lea. She must wait there until my daughter comes home, and

until I have been able to get into communication with

Gilbert. Then we'll know where we are."

They shook hands in silence, and Horne passed out. Thoughts lay upon Morison like a great deep flood. He could not have spoken another word to Horne, but he understood. When Jean, at the shutting of the door, ran into the parlour, she was amazed to find her father sitting in his chair with his face buried in his hands. Smeaton, who had followed her, made as if to step back and leave them alone, but Morison immediately looked up.

"Stop," he said. "There's no secret that you can't

hear."

"Some fresh trouble," cried Jean, clasping her hands together apprehensively. "What is it? Try and tell

me; I can't bear to see you like that."

"It's about Lily," he answered, rising somewhat heavily to his feet, with a strange uplifted look on his face. "That was Mr. Horne, of the Bonnygate Works, he that is to stand for Parliament after Easter. It seems—it seems that Lily is married to his second son."

Jean gave a little cry, and bit her lips.

"Tell us quick, father, quick as you can, how it

happened."

It did not take long to put them in possession of the facts, which surprised them both past all speech. In Jean's eyes there was a curious, deep look.

"Father, we were too quick to judge her. I shall

have to ask her pardon on my knees."

"We judged by what we saw, lass. I don't blame you. Whatever blame there is belongs to me, for, look you, there has been something far wrong when she could not tell me what was in her mind. You have stood up for her all through."

"Yes; but in my heart I was afraid," Jean said, in a low voice, and afraid lest her feelings should overpower her, she ran off to the kitchen on pretence of bringing

in the long-delayed tea.

Morison turned then to the man who had stood by him in his trouble, and who had bidden him be of good

cheer and courage all through.

"Look you, Smeaton, God Almighty has queer ways of workin' wi' a man," he said, getting back in his emotion to the Scotch of his boyhood. "Here was me, as hard as the nether millstone when things were dark; noo the clouds hae lifted, I'm like a bairn. If it wasna for very shame, I wad greet."

"If it would help you, friend, why not?" said the younger man, as he pushed his hand affectionately through his arm. "It would be no shame to you."

"She's comin' the nicht, the bairn, and see, I want to be in the hoose mysel', d'ye understand? So, after we get our tea, you and Jean'll go doon an' tell Isabel Oliphant, an' bring her back, an' I'll keep Lily till ye come."

Smeaton nodded, fully understanding, and when Jean heard she was nothing loth, only stipulating that on no account should Lily be suffered to leave until they came back.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE CHRISTIAN GENTLEMAN

HORNE took a cab at the corner of Ardmillan Street, and drove along to the Waverley Station, from

whence he took a ticket for Portobello.

Arrived there, he had to discover the house where his new daughter-in-law lived. It was not, however, a difficult task. Within fifteen minutes of leaving the Portobello Station, he had entered the quaint little garden, and was knocking at the door. It was opened to him by Miss Fiddes. Then he suddenly felt himself at a loss, not knowing whom to ask for. It was unlikely that Gilbert's wife would be living there under the name of Horne.

"I have called to see the young lady who lives here,

madam, Mrs.--"

"Mrs. Gilbert. Oh, yes. She isn't in at present. She's just gone out to pay a little bill. I am very sorry to say she is leaving me this evening. Her boxes are all packed, and she will bring a cab back with her."

Horne continued to look keenly at the sweet faded

face of Miss Fiddes with a puzzled expression.

"Where have I seen you before?" he asked abruptly.

"My name is Horne."

"And mine is Fiddes. I thought I recognised you. We met one Sunday afternoon about six months ago, did we not, at the house of Lord Kilmartin in Moray Place? You came in just as I was leaving."

"Right. I remember it well. May I come in, Miss

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Fiddes? There seems to be something here that wants clearing up."

Miss Fiddes held the door open wide, and when he

had entered she ushered him into the sitting-room.

"This is Mrs. Gilbert's room; but she won't mind. I am so sorry to lose her."

"Did she tell you where she was going, may I ask?"

"Yes, she said she was going to her husband's people."

"But did not mention their name?"

"No, but, of course, it would be Gilbert."

Horne put down his hat. It was a day of explanations. The curious grim look returned to his face.

"I see you know nothing. You are a friend or rela-

tive of the Inglises, are you not?"

"Yes, Lord Kilmartin is my second cousin."

"And you knew, of course, that Miss Inglis was to

marry my son, Gilbert?"

"Yes, of course. But why do you say was? They are to be married in June. I have even undertaken a very

small part of the trousseau myself."

"That will be cancelled, I expect immediately. Miss Inglis has written from Biarritz breaking the engagement, and a very good thing for us all, especially for her."

Miss Fiddes apprehensively clasped her hands.

"You have seen the husband of Mrs. Gilbert here, I suppose? Did you not recognise him as at the same time the lover of Miss Inglis?"

Miss Fiddes gave a little cry of dismay. "Oh, sir, surely that is an impossible story."

"It is perfectly true, madam, I am sorry to say. These explanations are sorry affairs, and I did not expect to have to make another one here. The young lady you have been sheltering all these weeks is my daughter-in-law, Mrs. Gilbert Horne."

"She is his wife?" said the little spinster convul-

sively.

"Yes, undeniably so. May I inquire how he ever came to take rooms from you? Seems suicidal, if secrecy was his object."

"Well, you see, he had never seen me," said the

little woman nervously.

"But any day Miss Inglis might have come here." "She did come one day when I was out, and spoke to Mrs. Gilbert."

Horne shrugged his shoulders.

" It's ghastly, and sounds like an Adelphi melodrama. My son has gone abroad. His wife very sensibly came to see me this morning, and I will take her to Burton Tiea."

"Who was she, Mr. Horne, and what was the meaning or object of all this absurd and horrible secrecy?"

"She was a Miss Morison, and belongs to perfectly respectable and superior people, and the only explanation was the affair with Miss Inglis. It is a mercy it has come to a crisis in time. May I inquire how you have found them as tenants here? Satisfactory, I hope? If there is anything owing I am ready to discharge everything."

"There is nothing owing. Mrs. Gilbert had a perfect horror of the smallest debt. Everything has been paid almost as she received it. And may I add that she is a very fine young woman, that you will have nothing to fear or be ashamed of. She-she is-pardon me,

superior to him."

The words were out before she could keep them back. Then realising that, while trying to reassure in one direction she was stabbing in another, the little woman

gave a nervous laugh.

"Oh, pray forgive me. What a fool I am. I meant to say that she is really very nice and very good, and so clever and sensible. Of late since we have grown more intimate, I have discovered all sorts of qualities in her. She has seemed to awaken to what life really is, and you will be quite surprised to find what depth she has." "I am glad to hear it, and you need not look so desperate because of what you said about my son. He has behaved very badly. We shall be happy to see you at Burton Lea, Miss Fiddes. You need not be entirely separated though Mrs. Gilbert has left your house."

Before Miss Fiddes could reply the door was quickly opened, and Lily came in. Her face flushed even more deeply at sight of them in conversation, and the same timid look which had touched Horne in the morning

sprang into her face.

"Oh, my dear, what a wonderful thing this is," cried the little spinster, turning to her with an involuntarily

outstretched hand. Lily smiled unsteadily.

"Thank you, dear Miss Fiddes. I ought to apologise for what I have done, because I am certain that if you had known you never would have had me in your house."

Miss Fiddes could not gainsay this. It was precisely what would have happened had she known. She slipped away, then Horne looked at Lily kindly.

"I have just come from your father. Everything has been made right there, and I have promised that you will go to him to-night. No, not to stay, only to assure him that what I have told him is true. Are you ready now? We'll go home."

He chose the word deliberately. Lily burst into

tears.

It was a painful moment for them both, and Horne did not know what to say. He cleared his own throat, and then suggested that they should say good-bye to Miss Fiddes. It was rather a tearful parting, and when the cab with the big boxes on the top had trundled away she sat down and cried unrestrainedly.

They did not talk much as they made the crosscountry journey by train, and then by another cab to Burton Lea. As they passed the Cleugh Cottage, Horne looked out, and somehow the steady lights in the window comforted him. So long as he had been active all day, with no time for thought, he had been able to rid himself of the acute depression consequent upon his discovery of Gilbert's treachery. Lily sat far back in the corner of the cab, her feelings too keen to permit of much speech. She was more than grateful for the fine and generous consideration that had been shown to her, and told herself passionately that it was ten times more than she deserved. She could not have complained justly had Gilbert's father turned his back upon her. She was reminded, as she looked at his clear-cut and rather stern profile of a definition she had somewhere read of the Christian gentleman: "One who will steer the straight course without veering to the right or to the left, who is hard upon himself, and insistent where duty is concerned, but full of a generous forbearance towards others. A man whose life and heart are both tender and pure."

All unconscious of what the shrinking figure at his side was thinking, Horne talked cheerily to her, but as they neared Burton Lea he pondered on the surprise that would be occasioned by her arrival there. The staff, largely consisting of old servants, though too well trained to pass any remarks, must nevertheless be considered. He decided to call Duncan, and tell him as briefly as possible what had occurred, at the same time instructing him to convey the information to the rest of the household. And in the meantime she would have Biddy's rooms, that were always held in readiness

against her return.

Lily sat up nervously as they swept up the avenue, and drew near to the house. Duncan, in amazement at sight of a station cab, and seeing the luggage, could only decide that Miss Biddy had suddenly come home. But when he saw his master and a strange lady he looked bewildered.

"Step out, my dear, and don't look so scared. It'll be over in a moment," said Horne kindly. Then just within the doorway he turned to Duncan.

"Duncan, this is my son's wife, Mrs. Gilbert. Do you understand? She has come to stay here, and for to-night she is to have Miss Biddy's room. Send Hannah to me in the library, and I'll give her a word."

Duncan respectfully inclined his head, at the same time taking in the new-comer from top to toe. But he was too well-bred to betray the profound depth of his

amazement.

To Lily Burton Lea seemed the most beautiful house she had ever seen in her life. Her timid air distressed Horne, and he tried to reassure her. He accompanied her upstairs himself, and opened the door of Biddy's room.

"Do you think she would like it, Mr. Horne?" she asked some fine feeling holding her back. "If I might ask, will you put me somewhere else? She would understand, any woman would, what I feel."

Horne nodded, and began to grasp what Miss Fiddes

had meant by unexpected qualities.

"There's plenty of rooms. Here's another one, a sort of guest room. Yes, this will do as well as another. They'll get you a fire, and look after you. You'll soon feel at home."

It was undoubtedly an awkward moment. If only Biddy had been at home! Horne was in no way concerned as to Biddy's attitude towards the new member of the family. In such a large, just, generous heart there could only be one feeling. If only she had been at home to take the desperately painful edge off the experience! But Horne was not to shrink from it because it was painful. It would not have hindered matters to have waited a few days or even weeks. But in his haste to repudiate any part in his son's conduct, he did not wait to consider expediency or the easiest way of arranging the new order of things.

Walter had said in the morning that he would not be home to dinner, and they had to dine together in solitary state. It was a strange experience for them both, but Horne, watching keenly, observed in his new daughter-in-law a simplicity of manners, a quiet self-possession which made it easy for them both. She put on the black silk frock in which Gilbert had been wont to admire her, and she sat at the table a fair and attractive figure, of which Duncan secretly approved.

"The brougham at half-past seven for Mrs. Gilbert, Duncan," his master said when he turned to leave the room, his service over. Already in his dressing-room upstairs, the master had told Duncan as much as he deemed wise, and asked him to pass on the information

to the rest of the household.

It was a most exciting subject of talk downstairs for the rest of the evening, and the maids popped about in all sorts of unexpected corners, anxious to obtain a glimpse of the new wife.

"I'll ride a little bit with you. I have a call to make at the Cleugh Cottage," said Horne when Lily came down with a long cloak over her silk frock, and her

veil tied neat and smart over her small hat.

Lily, still feeling that she was walking in a dream from which she must speedily awaken, took her seat in

the luxurious brougham by Mr. Horne's side.

"You are feeling nervous about going back," he said kindly. "I assure you there is no need. Your father will be glad. No; glad is hardly the word. He is longing to see you."

Lily put out her hand, and very timidly touched his

arm.

"Sir, if only you could look into my heart, if I could tell you what I feel. There is no other man in the whole wide world who would treat me as you have treated me this day. If only there was some way in

which I could repay you."

"Tut, tut, my dear. In a family there can never be any question of repayment. It's give and take all the time. Lick Gilbert into good shape, make a man of him; that's the best payment you can make to me."





"Father, father, forgive me! Say you forgive me!"

He did not see that in the half-darkness she slightly shook her head.

Presently the carriage stopped at the gate of the Cleugh Cottage, and he got down, only stopping before he closed the door on her to give her a little pat, and

speak another encouraging word.

The brougham rolled through the gathering dusk to Ardmillan Street, where Morison, alone in the house, had been watching from the window for a complete hour. Every moving vehicle below attracted and riveted his attention. But at last a carriage, easily distinguishable by its swift horse and smart livery on the box, stopped at the street door. Morison ran to the landing, and drew up the door, but he did not wait.

His tall, spare figure shaking like a leaf, he stood just within the parlour door, which was directly opposite the outer one. He had previously turned the gas full up in

the little hall.

He heard her nimble foot on the stair, even the swish of her silk skirts against the balustrade. There had been another watcher at the window, and as Lily came up the opposite door was very cautiously opened, and Jemima Bain put her head round it. When she saw Lily and heard the rustle of her skirt, she shook her head portentously, and went back to her own domain.

Lily happily did not see her, as she ran in and shut

the door.

"Jean, where are you, Jean?" she cried unsteadily and shrilly, seeing no one, for Morison, with that strange instinct of his race, had stepped right back into the room.

"Jean's oot," he answered from behind the door; "but I'm here, Lily."

"Father, father, forgive me! Say you forgive me! I only know now how cruel and wicked I have been! I've never had a happy day since I left. If I could go back and be as I was before I should bless God, but say you forgive me."

Morison, overcome by such a passion of fatherhood

as he had not experienced since the far-away days when he had been wont to walk the floor with the little bairns in his arms, knowing no weariness and crooning to them till they fell asleep, opened his arms, and Lily crept into them.

And after that a great quiet and a great peace fell

upon the little home.

CHAPTER XL

"SPEAK FOR YOURSELF, JOHN"

TUMPHREY has been talking this evening," said Elsie when she opened the door to Mr. Horne. "He remembers everything, and is asking very particularly whether he can see you."

"I have been very much occupied all day. This is my first free moment," he answered as he hung up his hat. "Been talking has he? But we shall have to be

very careful of him."

"The doctor says he can talk as much as he likes. He has been here to-night. And to-morrow, perhaps, he may get up. Don't you think it strange that after lying so like death all these days, he should recover all at once as it were?"

"I do. How is your mother?"

"So happy. She's up in Humphrey's room now." Horne followed her into the wide, low family room,

which had begun to mean so much to him, and sat down

somewhat heavily.

"I suppose I may tell you. Indeed, I must. Extraordinary things have happened to-day. It looks like a year since I left the house to go to business this morning. I have got at the bottom of all this mystery about Gilbert."

"No!" she exclaimed, standing by the table and looking at him with apprehensive eyes, and lips halfparted with excitement. "I hope it is not very bad,

that it will not make you any monge miserable than you have been about him so long."

"It does and it doesn't. Gilbert has a wife, Elsie, and she is at Burton Lea. I brought her home this afternoon."

Elsie continued to stare with wide open eyes.

"A wife! How dreadful—I me an, how extraordinary!

What is she like?"

"She's all right, quite all right. There was no need for all this abominable secrecay. Her name was Morison; her father is a schoolmaster on the south side. And, by-the-bye, she has an aunt interested in your mission, name of Miss Oliphant. I've heard Biddy speak about her. She's Miss Oliphant's niece."

"Is she a tall, slight girl, quite pretty, with auburn

coloured hair, and big blue eyes?"

"Yes, I believe that describes her accurately enough.

Have you seen her?"

"Once she came to the mission with Miss Oliphant, to the Christmas treat where you spoke. Mary Inglis was there, and Gilbert came with you, and right in the middle of the thing he went out, nobody knew why. I remember now, of course, perfectly. He followed her."

Horne looked grimly interested. Bit by bit the story

was being pieced out and all the gaps filled up.

"But how awfully good of you to take her to Burton Lea! Is she quite a nice girl?"

"Quite. She's ten times too good for Gilbert, Elsie,

and that's the unfortunate truth."

"Wait a little," said the girl gently. "He has been very weak, of course; but everybody is not so strongso strong and splendid as you."

The words stabbed Horne, even while they pleased

him.

"Weak. That's the word for it. He was between the devil and the deep sea, if you'll excuse the phrase. Desperate affairs need desperate words to describe them. He was afraid to own up because of Mary and her people. What a heavenly blessing that she broke the engagement before the story all came out. You saw the paragraph in the newspapers, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, I've seen it in several."

"It was very judiciously worded. Kilmartin's doing; so things might have been worse. What we've got to do now is to find Gilbert, and get them together again. Probably she will have to go out to America or where

he happens to land."

Elsie nodded. The whole matter seemed quite simple at the moment of talking, only unfortunately they were reckoning without a very important factor—Lily's consent. She had not the faintest hope or intention, or even desire, to be shipped away to a husband who did not want her, and she was presently to exhibit one of the qualities of which Miss Fiddes had spoken, an unusual quality in a woman, the strength of will to defy the conventions and live her own life on the lines she thought best for herself.

"So that's the melodrama of Gilbert's life, my dear," said Horne with a faint sigh. "It might have been worse all round. She has gone in to see her own people. I had an interview with her father this afternoon, a fine old chap, very angry with her, and very guiltless of any complicity. These two alone have been responsible. It narrows the blame, and, after all, what's the use of blaming them? They've got to live their lives yet, and

it may scourge them enough."

Elsie was silent, recalling all she knew about Gilbert Horne, and feeling very conscious of an indefinable pity

for the girl who was now his wife.

"I can't think how you brought yourself to do it, to bring her right home like that, and put her in her proper place," she said warmly. "I don't know any one else who would have done it. But it was just like you."

"I don't know what else there was to do. It was the only course open. One need not follow in the footsteps of folly and weakness. What do you suppose Biddy

will say? If there's no word of their return journey this evening I must write to her."

"Biddy will praise you in the gates even as I do,"

laughed Elsie. "Every woman will."

"Except Mrs. Inglis," said Horne with a slight smile as he rose.

Elsie made a little grimace, and shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, may I go up and see Humphrey now?" At the moment Mrs. Gerard opened the door.

"Good evening, Mr. Horne. I was sure it would be you. Humphrey has been hearing the voices, and sent me down to inquire. Will you come up? He is so very

anxious to see you."

"I am just this moment coming. Will you tell your mother about Gilbert's flight into the world of melodrama?" he asked with a lightness which served to cover up the real sadness of his thought. Then he left the room, and slowly mounted the narrow turret stair to the upper floor of the cottage.

A shaded lamp burned in the sick-room, and though Humphrey had not ventured to sit up, he was lying very alert and wideawake on the bed. He smiled broadly at

sight of his employer, and held out his hand.

"Well, boy, I'm glad to see you restored to ordinary life again. You've been a long time in the land of dreams. How do you feel?"
"A1," said Humphrey heartily. "I've had a rest,

that's all."

Horne shook his head.

"I'd have given you a year's leave rather than this should have happened. I have permission to let you speak, so please tell me what happened. I know, of course, that it was Gilbert. Had you quarrelled or what?"

"No. We had no open quarrel, but I think Gilbert fancied I was watching him. It was a pure accident that I called at the house with which," he added hesi-

tatingly, "I believe he had some connection."

"Yes," said Horne grimly. "His wife lived in it;

but go on."

"I went there to deliver a message for Miss Inglis, and Gilbert met me coming out. I could see that he was enraged beyond control. I suppose he spent the evening there, and our meeting at the gate was an accident too. I happened to be locking up, and heard his step. You know we don't have many late passers, so I had the curiosity to wait until he passed. It was Gilbert, and we never had a word. There was no opportunity. Still convinced that I was watching him, he let out at me on the spot, and I remember nothing more till I woke up to find myself here."

"Well, it was only the goodness of God that prevented it from being a ghastly tragedy, Humphrey," said Horne,

in a low voice. "I need not say I am sorry."

"Sorry? You couldn't help it. It was all in the day's work, and I'm none the worse for it, I hope. I'm sorry for all the anxiety you have had. Elsie tells me that Gilbert is clean away, and that Miss Inglis wrote before all this happened to break the engagement."

"She did, which is a mighty good thing for everybody concerned. I have Gilbert's wife at Burton Lea."

Gerard's eyes opened wide as Elsie's had done, and Horne quickly put him in possession of all the facts as

they had occurred.

"The fourth time I've told this story to-day. I ought to have my lesson perfect. I'll have to tell Walter before I sleep, I suppose, and write to Biddy. Then I hope that finishes me. I've got to make up to you somehow for all this, Humphrey."

Gerard's face flushed painfully.

"Sir, I implore you not to say that again or anything approaching it. I brought it partly on myself, and it is nothing. I can only hope that nothing has been made of it, that it never got into the newspapers. I have been afraid to ask Elsie."

"Oh, no. It was not in the newspapers, but Gilbert

ought not to have got off scot free. It might have been murder."

"He never intended that, Mr. Horne. He was furious, and hit out as any man would in the circumstances."

"Well, it's good of you to take it like that, and we'll leave it," said Horne as he rose to go. "What an exciting winter we've had! Biddy can't speak about monotony after this. Well, we'll hope to see you back at Bonnygate one of these days. They'll hold a jubilee over it. Bannerman is like a sheep without a shepherd. I must send him out to see you to-morrow afternoon—Saturday, isn't it? I believe I've lost count of the days."

They shook hands, and Horne went downstairs again after finally enjoining on him the necessity for keeping

quiet, and not exciting himself.

He sat a little while downstairs, and then rose to go. Elsie went to the door with him. It was a beautiful night, and a full moon riding high in the heavens, the soft air of spring brooding sweetly and fragrantly over the whole world.

"Oh, I should like a little walk," cried Elsie involuntarily. "Humphrey and I always used to go up to the top of the Cleugh on fine nights just after supper."

"Come now, if I am not too poor a substitute for

Humphrey."

She nodded, and catching up a shawl from the hatstand rolled it about her shoulders, leaving her head bare.

So they turned, not up the garden path to the road, but by the winding way at the back, which took them first into the depth of the Cleugh, and then up to the crest of the little hill, from whence a glorious view could be obtained. It was a very narrow path, and they had to walk in single file, Elsie first, talking all the while. Presently they came out upon the little plateau at the top where the moonlight lay in a white flood. There Elsie paused, and drew a long, deep breath.

"Isn't it lovely, heavenly, in fact? Do look at

Edinburgh in the distance; it is like a dream city. Now, can you tell me what is the matter with Walter, Mr. Horne? Do you know he has not been here. I have not even seen him to speak to in passing, for seven days."

"Walter, I expect, finds it better for his peace of mind to stop away," said Horne quietly. It was impossible to misunderstand the significance of his words. The girl's face flushed, and she half-turned her head away.

"Don't say that. It isn't, it can't be true."

"It is true, as I happen to know, for he has spoken to me about it."

She stood still, and looked at him almost in terror.

"About me, do you mean?"

"Yes. Is there no hope for him?"

"I like Walter very much, but I have never expected anything of this kind. I am very, very sorry. I would not have had it happen for the world. Are you sure, for he has never said anything to me?"

But even as she spoke certain words came back, words which had seemed obscure and odd at the time, but which

were now clear.

And her colour rose again.

"There is no doubt of it," said Horne dully, misunderstanding the meaning of the blush. "Need I say, that if you can say yes to him you will make us as a family very happy.'

She shook her head.

"Mr. Horne, it will never, never be. If you can, will you tell Walter this, so that he may never speak to me about it? It would be so painful for us both. I am very sorry. I wish I could have prevented it! I hope you believe it, that I have no idea—that such a thing never dawned upon me even as a possibility."

"I do believe it," said Horne, and bit his lip, for the

temptation to speak himself was too great.
"I hope you are not angry with me," she said timidly. "You have showered such gracious kindness on us, and somehow we don't seem to cause anything but trouble. Do you think I have been to blame about Walter? I have asked him to come, scolded him when he didn't, but—but I never dreamed of this."

"I do believe you, and I'm glad of it," he replied. "I think we had better go now. I am afraid of the night

air for you."

She turned, somewhat chilled by his tone, and certain in her own mind that she had given him some offence. They scarcely spoke a word until they came back once more to the entrance to the little garden. There she paused and turned to him with a wistful air.

"Are you disappointed too? Would you like me

to—to marry Walter?"

"No," he answered with a curious harsh note in his voice. "I can safely say I would not."

This note, so unusual, caused her to shrink a little

away.

"You don't ask why, but I will tell you," he went on with the reckless air of a man who has thrown prudence to the winds. "I want to marry you myself."

Again the rich crimson colour flooded her face, and

she covered it with her hands.

"No fool like an old one," he went on grimly. "I'm fifty-three, fifty-three. Do you hear? Just double your age, yet that is what I want. Forget what I have said. I will never say it again nor trouble you with it," he added almost humbly. "Above all, let it make no difference to our happy friendship."

It was a long time before she spoke, and then only when he passed through the gate, and gently touching

her arm bade her come into the house.

Suddenly then she threw up her head, and looked at

him, and what he saw there staggered him.

"Elsie, Elsie, you would not! It is impossible! I don't want your pity, the pity of a young bright life for an old one. Do you hear?"

"I hear," she said with a falter in her voice. "You have never been old, you never will be old," she whispered, and he drew her to his heart.

CHAPTER XLI

GREAT CHANGES

BIDDY received a letter from her father on the morning they left Biarritz. Mary, who occupied the room in the corridor next to her, saw from her face that she had been crying.

It had been a strange sojourn in a foreign land, and the days before Lord Kilmartin arrived upon the scene

had been most painful.

It seemed to Biddy that every disagreeable quality possessed by Mrs. Inglis came to the surface, and poor Mary suffered acutely through her sharp tongue, and her constant talk, talk about a subject that, after the first explanation, ought to have been banned.

As a matter of fact, however, Mary had given very little explanation, and when put through a desperate cross-examination by her mother, had simply adhered to the assertion that she had changed her mind.

It was the talk and verdict of Edinburgh society

which Mrs. Inglis feared.

"So bad for any girl's prospects," she added, with a significant look at her daughter.

Then did Mary fire up.

"I have no prospects, mother. I don't want any prospects. If you want to get rid of me, I am sure daddy doesn't. I'll write to him."

Which she did, the letter which brought him to

Biarritz.

There was one rather stormy scene between Kilmartin (303)

and his wife, ending in victory for him. Never had his wife seen him so roused, and she had sense enough to know that her best policy would now be to hold her

tongue.

Biddy also welcomed the genial presence of Mary's father, whose simplicity of character she had always admired. She had suffered, too, and was full of haunting fears regarding matters at home. These fears were realised when she received her own father's letter, telling the extraordinary story of Gilbert's secret marriage, and the establishment of his wife at Burton Lea. Horne's own affair with Elsie Gerard had not then been settled, so that Biddy only heard a part of the great changes going on at home. But that part was enough to fill her with forebodings.

Everything was packed up; in an hour they would leave the hotel. Mary ran in to see whether she could

be of any use to her friend.

Their relations were undisturbed. Biddy had frankly admitted to Mary that her own wonder was that the engagement had not been broken long ago. But all the same she had a secret shame about imparting the news she had just received.

"You've been crying, Biddy," Mary said severely, the

moment she looked in at the room door.

"Yes, and small wonder."

"What has happened? I saw your letter from home.

What is in it? Anything concerning me?"

"Well, yes; and as you will have to be told, the best way will be to read the letter," said Biddy, a little desperately. She handed the open sheet to Mary, turned the key in the door, and stood at the open balcony window while she read it. It was not a very long letter, because already Horne knew the date of their departure from Biarritz; but he had thought it better to break the news so that they, but especially Biddy, would have time to get accustomed to the idea before she had to meet the new inmate of the house.

Mary read the letter through, and handed it back in silence.

Her face was rather white. She would not have been a woman had she not been stabbed by its contents, which revealed how lightly and cheaply she had been held by the man whose name she had permitted to be associated with hers.

"It is a strange story, Biddy," she said in rather a strained voice. "I am glad you showed it to me, but please don't say anything to father or mother just yet. I feel as if I could not really bear any more until we get home. It has been rather awful."

She shivered a little, and Biddy, her warm heart over-

flowing, put her arm round her shoulders.

"Darling, it has been horrible—yes, horrible!" she cried with a little stamp of her foot. "It fills me with such shame that a brother of mine should have behaved like this. We don't deserve that you should speak to any of us again."

"That would be foolish—foolish and unjust—besides, I should punish myself," replied Mary, quite sincerely.

"Believe me, I am sorry for that poor girl."

"You are an angel to take it like that. What do you think of what my father has done? It seems a bit quixotic, doesn't it? And I am not sure how I shall behave."

"You must behave as he expects you to behave, Biddy, and remember that he had good reason for what he has done. Your father always does the right thing, Biddy; he has the most just and generous mind I have ever known."

"I'll try to remember that," said Biddy, little dreaming how she would need to call these words rather sharply to remembrance before she was many hours older.

"Mary, may I ask you one question before we go?" she said a trifle wistfully.

"Yes; I'll answer if I can."

"Do you care any more for Gilbert? If I thought

you cared I should not be able to endure myself."

"I don't care. If I had I could not have broken the engagement though he had behaved twice as badly," she replied frankly. "You need not trouble about me in that way, dear. It is only my pride that is suffering now, and I'm so horribly tired of it all."

Then was Biddy satisfied, and they parted, both feel-

ing the better for what had passed.

They travelled easily, sleeping one night at Paris, and on the evening of the fourth day arrived at Edinburgh.

Looking eagerly out, Biddy was disappointed not to see her father, but Walter. Thus does the studious man who takes little part in the affairs of life drop out.

But Biddy thought he looked rather pale and ill.

The parting with the Inglises was quickly made, and Biddy, having collected her baggage, got into the brougham with her brother.

"How are you, old boy? You've been burning the

midnight oil surely, you look so thin and pale."
"I'm working rather hard," he answered evasively. "It's pretty stiff, I assure you, and I had lost the real student habit, I suppose. I'll have a hard struggle to get through."

"But you like it, I hope?" said Biddy quickly, imagin-

ing a somewhat depressed note in his voice.

"Oh, yes, but it was a thousand pities that I ever left it at the beginning."

Biddy gave a quick little sigh. Here undoubtedly was

another life out of joint.

"You haven't told me where father is yet," she said impatiently.

"Didn't I? Oh, he's speaking at a political meeting, electioneering on the south side.

"Oh, has the campaign begun?"

"Yes; didn't you know?" "I had a letter from him the other day, but he didn't mention it. What about Gilbert's wife? Is she possible, Walter?"

"Possible? Oh, yes, quite; she's very nice, and uncommonly pretty," he answered with some lightening of his face. "We rather like having her there. It's horribly dull without you, of course."

"Is she aggressive at all?"

"Not at all; she is simply a guest, as any other person would be. You needn't feel any apprehension on that score, Biddy, I assure you; and, of course, you'll be kind to her."

"Well, I hope so. I mean to be, but I can never make promises," said Biddy, rather shortly. "Mary has lectured me sufficiently. She says quite frankly that she is to be pitied for being married to Gilbert, and that we ought to show her as much kindness as possible."

"That's very good of Mary. Not many women would

be so generous," said Walter, sincerely.

"Tell me how the Gerards are. Is Humphrey better?"

"Yes; he went back to business yesterday, but he has

got a shake, Biddy."

"That was horrible, too. Isn't it a wonder how much disaster one irresponsible person can work in this world, and convulse a peaceable area with all sorts of disturbances?"

" It is wonderful."

"And Elsie and Mrs. Gerard? You are not a communicative person, Walter. You ought to remember how long I have been away, and how insatiable I am for news."

"They are quite well," he answered. "I have not

been at the Cleugh Cottage since last Sunday."

"And this is Friday," she said, pursing up her lips.
"Then you must have been working hard. Tell me,
Walter, does father mean that Mrs. Gilbert is to remain
permanently at Burton Lea?"

"Certainly not; that would be unfair to you. He is

only waiting until Gilbert has been laid hold of."

"Then she's to be shipped off to him? How nice for

her!" observed Biddy, with curling lip. "I'd rather sweep a crossing myself than go to a man who had treated me like that, but I suppose it'll be all right from her point of view."

"I suppose it is. I've never spoken to her on the

subject, you see. I'm very little in the house." "Will father be at home when we get there?"

"Yes, certainly. It's almost seven, and dinner was ordered for half-past. I heard him telling Duncan myself, and he remembered all the things you specially liked."

"How sweet of him!" said Biddy with a tender

smile. "Oh, Walter, what a woman that is!"

"What woman?" inquired Walter, rather bewildered,

she was off at such a sudden tangent.

"The Inglis woman. If she were my mother I should certainly do something desperate. Mary is an angel, positively an angel. When her father came the atmosphere, which had been charged with thunder and lightning and other explosives, suddenly cleared. If only I could have been present when he had it out with Mrs. Inglis I should be a happier woman to-day! But he did give it to her, I am sure. He looked as if he meant to, and she has been very subdued ever since. She's not a woman, but a machine, Walter. Why is it that nice men always have horrid wives, and vice versa?"

"I give it up," said Walter. "Here we are, and Ann Glass at the gate! Everybody is glad to see you

back, dear."

" They didn't look out at the Cleugh Cottage, though, and I forgot," said Biddy. "But perhaps they'll be up this evening. Do you think it likely?"

Walter did not answer.

The carriage stopped a moment while Biddy spoke to Mrs. Glass, then rolled on to the house. Horne stood bareheaded inside the porch, and in a moment Biddy had thrown herself into his arms. There was no doubt about her gladness at getting back, her convulsive clasp and little, breathless sob proclaimed it. Horne held her close a minute, and then at arm's length, to see how she looked. Then they passed into the house. Horne drew her a moment to the library, and Biddy guessed what for:

"Where is she, father? We may as well get it

over.'

"I left her in the drawing-room. She's very nervous,

poor thing, but you'll put her at her ease."

"I'll try to. What a man you are, dad! You'd put straight all the things out of joint in the world if you could."

An indefinable change crossed his face.

"I don't know. Seems to me our lives have got permanently out of joint since you went away. I mustn't keep you now, but you'll come to me here after dinner. I've a great many things to talk to you about, and one in particular."

All right, dear. No, don't come up. I'll go and

see Mrs. Gilbert by myself."

She took the stairs two at a time, humming as she went. It was sweet to be home again. Already everything seemed easy and right.

Lily was standing in the middle of the room when the door opened. Biddy's quick eye took her in from

top to toe. Her greeting was quite characteristic.

"So you are my new sister? I am glad to see you, though I am sorry my brother has behaved so badly. Between us, however, we might bring him to his senses."

She held out both her hands and kissed Lily, and

that was the end of it.

"You needn't be afraid of me. I'm only Biddy, whom nobody minds, and so long as you're here we're

going to be happy together."

She struck the keynote she meant to keep all through, and from that moment there was no misunderstanding. Lily felt a relief too great for words. Horne had had

great difficulty in inducing her to remain at Burton Lea until Biddy's return. The dinner passed off without a hitch, but a close observer might have noticed that it was Biddy who did most of the talking.

Horne himself seemed the least at ease. Small wonder, when he considered the nature of the communication

he had to make to his daughter.

So far he had kept his own counsel, not even telling Walter that he had arrived at an understanding with Elsie Gerard.

"Lily will excuse you, Biddy," he said after dinner.

"We have a great deal to talk about."

Lily smiled with a quick understanding, and watched them leave the room together with admiring eyes. She was grateful to Biddy for the way she had treated her, and the last cloud but one seemed rolled away from her life. They entered the library, and Horne closed the door.

He had eaten little dinner, and now a visible nervous-

ness overtook him.

"How's the campaign getting on, dear?" she asked, planting herself on the edge of the writing table, and dangling her feet comfortably. "To-morrow I'll plunge into it. I was dying to get here to begin with, but that woman wouldn't move until her own time came."

"You don't speak respectfully of her."

"I can't. Nobody could. She has no heart. I'll tell you things bit by bit; if I were to let you have the whole avalanche at once it would overwhelm you. Matrimony has never had any charms for me, but I'm certain if Mrs. Inglis were my mother I should run away with the butcher, the baker, or the candlestick-maker. How Mary stands it I don't know, but the back is made for the burden. Now tell me about yourself. What have you been doing-working horribly hard, poor old dad, and all this has taken it out of you, it has?"

"I've felt it a good deal, but it might have been worse. I have something else on my mind, Biddy, something which I fear will affect you most deeply.

"I can guess," she said quietly. "You want to marry again."

"How did you know?"

"I have always kept myself in readiness for it, since one day, long ago, when a woman told me it would certainly happen."

"Who was the woman?"

"You needn't know, dear. What I want to know is, who is the woman now? Is it somebody you have got to know since I went away."

"Yes and no. I am going to marry Elsie Gerard."

Biddy's face flushed, and her eyes became slightly rebellious. She slid down from her perch, and there was a moment's painful silence.

"I never expected that, father. She—she is a mere

girl. I—I—-

Her feelings overcame her. She waited just another second, and then dashed out of the room, leaving Horne dismayed. He had not expected this. He had built high hopes on Biddy's common sense and wonderful tactful philosophy. He endured a very bad half hour. Then, unable to bear himself longer, he went in search of her, but she was nowhere to be found.

"Miss Biddy, sir," said Duncan, meeting him in the hall. "I saw her a little ago. She said she was going to the Cleugh Cottage to see Miss Gerard, and that would you please come down a little later and bring her

home?"

CHAPTER XLII

AUNTIE BELL'S PHILOSOPHY

MISS OLIPHANT'S shop was closed, and she was going over her weekly accounts when a visitor was announced—Mr. Horne. She rose to greet him warmly. They had met more than once in the last few weeks, and had arrived at a swift understanding of one another. Nobody rejoiced more heartily than Isabel Oliphant at the happy turn affairs had taken with her relatives at Ardmillan Street, though her mind was by no means easy concerning the future of her niece Lily. She was still at Burton Lea, though sometimes she would be spending a few days at her father's house, where she was more than welcome.

"Good afternoon, Miss Oliphant. I am happy to have found you in. Can you spare me ten minutes or

so?"

"Certainly; twenty or thirty, I'm no' that busy, and if you'll tak' an early cup o' tea wi' me I'll be very prood."

"I shall be very grateful for it," said Horne as he put down his hat and took a chair. There was something about Miss Oliphant's personality at once cheerful and pleasant. She was so thoroughly capable, such an atmosphere of sound common sense and true kindliness enveloped her that her views on life must always be worth listening to. Such was the impression made on Horne several times recently, and now accentuated. He blessed the inspiration that brought him here.

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"I hear you're off to London to the Parliament soon," she observed after she had rung the bell and given her order to the faithful maid.

"Yes, whenever the Whitsun holidays are over-next

Wednesday, in fact, I go into harness."

"Will ye like the life, think ye?"

"I think so; I intend to like it. We can like most things in this world if we set our minds to it."

"Indeed, an' ye never spoke a truer word," she said

earnestly. "Does Miss Biddy go with you?"

"Yes, I suppose you have heard that I am going to be married in the autumn?"

"Yes, I have heard it from my niece Lily."

"You disapprove, I suppose? December and May,"

he said with a slight shade of bitterness.

"I neither approve nor disapprove, but this I have said. A man has a richt to please himsel', and you have had a lonely life. If it is to be for your happiness I hope the Lord will bless ye, Maister Horne. Ye have tried to make the road a bit easier for a guid mony in your time. It's meet and fit ye should get some sunshine for yoursel', and if ye think it lies that way everybody must wish ye weel."

"Thank you kindly," said Horne, moved beyond the

common by her words.

"It's a risk maybe, but she's an uncommon sensible lass, and your daughter has telt me that it's a genuine love match."

"Did Biddy say that?"
"In this very room, sir."

"Does she come here sometimes?" asked Horne,

looking as if he were pleased to hear it.

"Oh, yes, they a' come fractime to time. Auld Bell Oliphant seems to ha'e something to say they're no' abune hearin'. They a' come. She was here last Sunday."

"You are a power in this city, Miss Oliphant," said Horne involuntarily. "And perhaps we shall never know what we owe to you till you leave us." "Oh, it's little I can dae. I like the lassies, and they ken I like them. Miss Inglis was here yesterday to her tea. She's a sicht happier than she was, Maister Horne."

"Is she?" he asked, with the most intense interest.
"I am glad to be assured of it. I have only seen her once since she returned from abroad. Naturally, she does not come to Burton Lea at present."

"Of course not. I think I must tell ye, sir. She's

takin' up her heid wi' somebody else."

Horne betrayed the most intense interest and surprise.

"She telt me hersel', an' she winna mind me tellin'

ye. Indeed, she said so. It's Maister Gerard."

Horne rose to his feet, overcome with further astonishment.

"My dear woman, that's quite impossible. Why,

they'd never consent."

"That'll no' maitter, I believe. They're made for wan anither, an' they're aye meetin', Edinburgh or no' Edinburgh. He seems a masterfu' man that sees dykes but to loup them. That's the kind we like," she added, with a little humorous smile.

But Horne continued to look incredulous.

"I can't take it in. I'd better get away to London, I think, and leave them to fight it out. Life is too

much for me,"

"We havena that much to do wi' it that I can see," observed Miss Oliphant philosophically. "Noo, my brither-in-law Morison, that used to be a terrible Calvinist, believing a'body but the elect wad gang till hell fire, has become like a little bairn. If only my sister Katie had lived to see it! She kens, of course; I believe that, but I wad ha'e liket to see the licht on her face. She lived in the dark a' her mairret life. Dinna look so glum, my man. Blessed be the Lord, He's aye abune—"

Horne was comforted more than he knew or could

express.

She saw that he was too deeply moved for speech. Happily at the moment the tea-tray made a timely diversion, and a normal state of feeling was restored.

"I really came to see you to-day to speak to you

about your niece. Has she been here lately?"

"Yes, she was here yesterday. She's here maist days on her way back and forrit to her faither's," said Miss Oliphant, giving her whole attention to the teapot. She could guess his errand, and perhaps she feared that the interview might be a trifle difficult.

"Did she tell you we had had a letter from Gilbert?"

" Yes"

"And that he wishes her to go out to British Columbia? He has fallen in with young Inglis, and they may work the place together."

"Yes, she telt me a' that."

"And did she also tell you that she is not willing to

go?"

"Yes, she said that too. Indeed, she has never made ony secret o' it frae the very beginnin', when you took her first to Burton Lea."

"It's a point of view I can't quite understand. After all, she is his wife, and I was brought up to think that a wife's place is at her husband's side."

Miss Öliphant nodded.

"That was the way of it, and is still, when it's a richt mairrage."

Horne looked uncomfortable.

"This decision on her part complicates everything, and is specially awkward for her. We've done our best, Miss Oliphant, but you can't shut people's mouths. The only way would be for her to go."

"It wad shut their mooths on that particular bit," admitted Miss Oliphant. "But that's a sma' maitter."

"What does Morison say? I thought of going to

him after I had spoken to you."

"Morison is of wan mind wi' me, Maister Horne, for the first time in his life."

"Then you really believe that Lily is right? You would support her in this extraordinary decision? It appears to me extraordinary, anyhow, but there may be

reasons."

"There's every reason. Look ye, Maister Horne. He gaed awa' believin' that he had nae wife, an' no' carin' what became o' the puir lass. That was a cooard's act an' a scoondrel's. I canna mince my words. It was only when there was a way oot, when he found the halter was really roond his neck, that he ga'e in, and graciously said she micht come. If ony niece o' mine had ta'en him at his word, look see, I wad ha'e disowned her, and said she was cheap o' ony trouble she micht ha'e."

Horne was silent. The argument was quite un-

answerable.

"But, mind ye, though that's my mind on't, I never said a word to Lily, for I've learned wan thing at least in my life, an' that's to keep my nose ooten ither folks' business, especially where marriage is concerned. Ye get a' yer thanks in wan day. It's the lassie's ain mind, and I'm thankfu' to the Lord that she has as muckle sense an' spunk, that I am."

"I haven't a word to say. It's a new point of view. It shows a courage and independence which are amazing and admirable. Well, we must go on as we are, I suppose. I won't say another word. But the story can't

end here. There must be another chapter."

"Weel, we can wait for it, Maister Horne. But we canna gang on quite as we are. You ha'e dune your pairt, and God will reward you for it. It's been a lesson to a guid pickle folk besides the Morisons. But Lily will not bide at Burton Lea. She's comin' to me. Morison and me ha'e talked it over, an' she's comin'."

Horne waited for further enlightenment.

"Her sister Jean is to be married in July, and Morison is gaun to live wi' them. I'm no' sayin' whether I approve or disapprove o' that, but they can try it ony-

way. Grant Smeaton's a splendid man. There's no' mony o' his kind in the world. And Lily will come here. I'm needin' help in my business. It's a very guid business, Maister Horne; a peep at my books wad maybe surprise ye. Maybe ye wouldn't like your daughter-in-law to serve in a shop, but I'll promise ye she winna dae that. It is not necessary. She'll be in the hoose, and help me in ither ways, and she'll be happy. You can take my word for it, because she trusts her Auntie Bell, and I've wantit her ever since her mither, my sister, deid."

"It seems an excellent arrangement," Horne admitted. "And I have not a word to say, but I can't help hoping that the other matter will be settled, and

that she and Gilbert will be together again."

"Weel, if that ever comes to pass, and I'm no' sayin' it winna, he'll ha'e to come hame and coort her ower again. That's the Gospel truth, Maister Horne. An' it's richt that it should be. She canna exactly be a mat for him to wipe his feet on. I'm wi' the lassie in this, an' I ken that you winna make it hard for her, because it's the richt thing she's doin'. Indeed, the only thing; the ither wad be a degradation and a shame, but there's nae shame in honest wark."

Horne held out his hand.

"You are a good woman, Miss Oliphant. I wish there were many more like you."

Isabel Oliphant laughed.

"I'm jist as I'm made," she answered. "An' as I've never entered the married state I've had time to make up my mind aboot things in peace."

He laughed at her quaint conceit as he passed out. Instead of going on to Morison's, he began to walk

leisurely back the way he had come.

He pondered many things as he walked. His family affairs, which had got into such a tangle, were being evened out. As yet there was little enthusiasm about his own marriage, though Biddy had behaved well, and

there was no breach between Burton Lea and the Cleugh

Cottage.

He took the by-paths, and came to the house by the meadows and the wood behind. And he found Biddy there, with her book, sitting on an old bench, a favourite seat under a tree. She smiled at sight of him, and beckoned him to her side.

"I wondered where you had been so long. Lily has gone to her father's, and Walter will only be home in

time for dinner. Where have you been?"

"I have been to tea with an oracle, Biddy. One of the wise women who are sent into the world from time to time to help to unravel its affairs."

"There's only one in Edinburgh answering to that

description-Miss Oliphant."

"That's the woman. What do you think about this plan of Lily's to go and live with her aunt? Are you in the revolt too? Don't you think she ought to go out to Canada?"

Biddy's lip curled.

"If she had gone after that letter, dad, I'd never have forgiven her; at least, I should have despised her, which is worse. I told her she's behaving splendidly. I am so glad one woman has the courage to say she shall live a self-respecting life."

"It'll make people talk."

"Yes, and it will hurt our pride a little bit; but Lily's right, father."

"All the women say that."

"And the good men. You are only pretending, dearest. You know in your soul that Lily is right, quite right."

He sat silent a moment with his eyes on the mossy

carpet at their feet.

"Father, I want to speak to you now we're on family matters. I want you to get married soon, next month, and take Elsie to London with you. I don't want to go. Indeed, I don't."

Horne flushed a little, and regarded Biddy's face

keenly. She nodded.

"Fact, I mean what I say. I've had it out with Elsie. I want to live my own life too—to come and go as I like. You are going to make a generous provision for me, and I want to go out and spend it, not on myself, but on other people. I knew long ago I should never be a success at home. I am not built that way. I'll become a deaconess or a sister of the people, or something of that sort, and come and go as I feel inclined. 'And when I'm tired I'll come back to you and Elsie, and I know I'll find my own corner again, my own room, and my welcome. That's how it's going to be."

Horne's shoulders heaved.

"I'm a free-lance, you see, dad. You know how many faux-pas I have made already in the social business. I should never be a success here. I'm tired of it already, so please say you quite approve, and give me your blessing."

"I can't, Biddy; by heaven, I can't. It's like cutting

off my right hand."

"No, no. You won't lose me, you know, and Elsie understands that. I'm very glad you are going to marry her, because I should have been kept here by my duty to you; but I should never have been quite happy."

"I can't say anything, Biddy. All the women of my family seem to have minds of their own, and seem to

have made them up."

He spoke whimsically, because he was really deeply

moved, and did not wish to show it.

"What a year it has been, and is going to be! I suppose you have observed the signs in the other direction, and that we'll have another marriage by-and-bye—Humphrey and Mary?"

"Miss Oliphant mentioned something of the sort to

me, but I had some difficulty in taking it in."

"It's true, and they're going to be absurdly happy. You'll have to make me a partner, dad. I'm doing my little best too. Yesterday I mentioned in the most casual way to Mrs. Inglis that Lady Eastwell of Hurst Park is Elsie's aunt, and that she's coming on a visit to the Cleugh Cottage in a fortnight. You should have seen her jump. She ran to her Peerage, I could take my affidavit, the moment I was out, and when the marriage announcement comes she won't forget to say 'nephew to Lord Eastwell'."

Horne smiled, and shook his head.

"Biddy, you are incorrigible! I wonder what man

would ever get you in hand."

"Nothing easier, darling, if the right one comes along," she assured him. "I'm going to have a fine time watching the experiments of everybody else, and waiting with Lily for the regeneration of Gilbert. That'll come, daddy, as sure as I stand here, and she will have done it."

"I believe you. If women took that view, perhaps

some of us would be better."

"You are the very best," she said, as she clung to him for one passionate moment. "And because of that you're going to be the happiest. Go and ask Elsie how soon she can be ready to take that journey to London."



